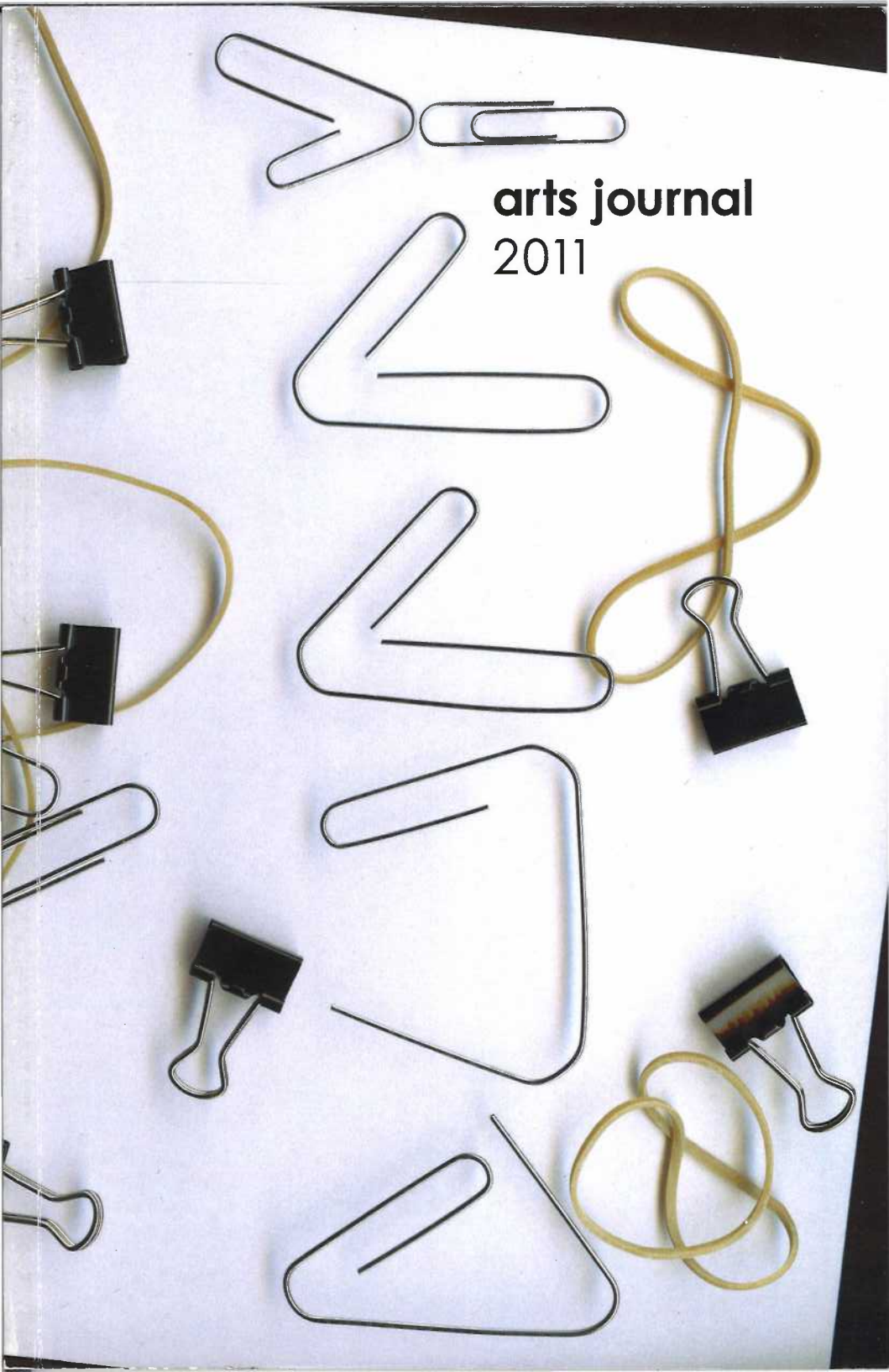


arts journal
2011



Curry Arts Journal 2011

CURRY COLLEGE
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Curry Arts Journal 2011

COVER DESIGN: ROBERT MORRISON

LAYOUT / PRODUCTION: WINSTON HUGHES

FACULTY ADVISOR and EDITOR: KAREN D'AMATO

DESIGN FACULTY ADVISOR: HEATHER SHAW

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Madalene Easterbrook "A Maze of Colors" Glazed Stoneware



Elissa Korsakov, "Cobalt Weave" Glazed Stoneware

Editors' Note

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading *Curry Arts Journal 2011*! We appreciate the support you've shown over the years and hope you enjoy the writing and artwork we have compiled as well as our new design format. In creating the journal, our goal was to offer a forum that encouraged the work of the many truly talented writers and artists at Curry College. The range of quality work made the selection process extremely difficult, but we have striven to represent the artistic innovation present throughout the campus and display it in a way that has its own aesthetic merits.

This past fall, to achieve a better understanding of art and its timeless appeal, we visited the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. There, we asked ourselves these questions: What makes art good? What makes these pieces transcend self-expression and become something nourishing and inspirational? Every exhibit in the museum was there because of its lasting value. The works had importance beyond the personal, an intrinsic value to anyone who perceived them. It is this aspect that we knew we should look for when choosing visual art and written work for the *Curry Arts Journal*.

We want everyone who submitted to know that your creations were all appreciated and enjoyed. If your piece did not get chosen, do not despair. Your skills are needed and welcomed to enhance the quality of *Curry Arts Journal 2012*. For the next edition, we highly encourage all Curry students to submit literary and visual artwork on any and all subjects. Submitting a piece is a great learning experience and having it published is a significant recognition and achievement. Additionally, we call on faculty members to encourage students to submit their work and also spend a semester or two as a *Curry Arts Journal* editor. Students need to know this is a great opportunity, especially if they are unsure of future career plans. Who knows? Their work on the *Curry Arts Journal* may unearth a hidden talent or a love for the arts that they never realized they had. As editors, we were fortunate to experience different genres and media through a perspective that not only influenced our own

writing and artwork but also strengthened our ideas on art and culture. We have a newfound respect for those who passionately work day in and day out to produce something of such meaning and value.

In the year-long process of overseeing all the submissions, selecting pieces for publication, and showcasing student work, we have acquired experience through practice and expanded our skills in critiquing, editing, design, layout, publicity, and event planning. As a student-based publication, we hope to increase the size of our team and make the *Arts Journal* more successful each year. The interest we've received over the years has propelled us to continue our work in the hope of topping the previous edition. As a result of our readers' suggestions and our editing team meetings, several changes will be in store for future iterations of the *Arts Journal*. There will be an ever-expanding online presence with the advent of our Facebook page as well as the inclusion of a PDF file of the most recent edition on the Curry College website. (Go to the English Section and click on the *Curry Arts Journal* tab.) With every new year, fresh faces bring new and exciting individuals and their artistic talents. The student body is ever-changing, and with it, so is the *Arts Journal*.

For students interested in working on the *Curry Arts Journal*, the English Area offers *Curry Arts Journal* Practicum I and II, ENG 2540 and ENG 2545, taught by Professor Karen D'Amato. Students may enroll in both courses to earn three credits per semester and six credits during an academic year. Each course may also be repeated once for a total of twelve credits. The structured, for-credit arrangement encouraged us to stay on task and enhanced our dedication to process and product. Participating students experience a range of responsibility that influences the *Arts Journal's* content, including corresponding with students concerning their submissions, arranging workshops with student authors, editing final selections, and planning events.

As editors, we were also responsible for a variety of public relations activities, including conducting classroom visits to publicize *Curry Arts Journal* deadlines and events and designing flyers. This year's flyers received an updated, literary look, which we hope enhanced the awareness on campus. During the spring semester, we held a spoken word performance and open mic, inviting students

to attend the show as well as read different genres of their own writing and listen to the works of their peers. In honor of National Poetry Month, the event took place in April in the Student Center Large Meeting Room. The coffeehouse setting included tables covered in art paper, and markers were provided to draw and write with during the evening. One audience member even read a piece he composed on site! The performance and question and answer segments by ARTiculation spoken word artists Tory Bullock, Terri Deletetsky, and Danny Balel wowed the audience, and we thank Tory and his friends from Boston Center for the Arts for their continued support, inspiration, and wonderful entertainment. We also want to thank Director of the Student Center and Student Involvement Allison Coutts O'Connor, Assistant Director of Student Center Operations Mark Metevier and their team, as well as Coordinator of Student Activities Caressa Kiselus for helping us plan, publicize, and carry out the event. Their hospitality and collaboration contributed so much to its success.

On the subject of collaborations, 2010 continued an exciting partnership between Curry's award-winning radio station WMLN (91.5 FM) and the *Curry Arts Journal*: readings of selections from the 2010 edition were broadcast live at the Student Involvement Fair in September. This was a great way to celebrate the new edition and extend the reach of Curry writers. Further, this year marked the first broadcast in which student writers were invited to read their own pieces on the air. Fall Practicum members graciously filled in for those who were unable to be on campus to read their work. We would like to thank WMLN, especially WMLN Director Alan Frank and Program Managers Dan Mazella and Marita MacKinnon for coordinating and producing this event.

We would also like to thank Associate Director of Student Activities Sarah Bordeleau for including *Curry Arts Journal* selections, particularly those of graduating seniors, in the 2011 edition of *Amethyst*, the Curry College yearbook. As in previous years, we were happy to share selections and pleased that many of this year's writers and artists have found a wider audience and second home in the yearbook. We heartily encourage other innovative partnerships with a variety of student organizations in the future.

Concerning the *Arts Journal's* production, we have again received valuable help from individuals in the Curry Publications

Department, namely Photography Assistant Brian Winchester, who photographed and prepared the artwork and Graphic Designer Rosemarie Valentino who was available for consultation as we embarked on a new supervisory arrangement for the student Production Artist. This year marks our first year with Graphic Design Professor Heather Shaw on board to coordinate and oversee the design work. Our enthusiastic thanks go out to her and to Production Artist Winston Hughes for their innovative work on this edition. Because of them and Cover Artist Robert Morrison, *Curry Arts Journal 2011* has a whole new look!

In closing, we wish to thank literary faculty judges Jeannette DeJong, Allan Hunter, Bruce Johnson, Sandy Kaye, Lori Lubeski, David Miller, and Gail Phaneuf for their time, their sensitive reading of texts, and their useful comments toward revision; special thanks go out to David Miller for his detailed written comments on poems and to Jeannette DeJong for her thorough editing of short stories. We also send our appreciation to Fine and Applied Arts faculty members Laurie Alpert, Efram Burk, Bob Carew, Iris Kumar, Heather Shaw, Elizabeth Strasser, and Rob Thurlow for their time, expertise, and encouragement of student artists. This year, we would especially like to thank Heather Shaw for guiding her students in their creative cover designs.

Our thank yous would not be complete without acknowledging Acting Director of Levin Library David Miller and his staff for providing the Practicum with a friendly meeting place as well as access to a library computer lab; Paula Cabral, Senior Administrative Assistant for the Faculty Building, and work-study students Christine Behan, Caitlin Bye, Rachel Daponte, and Ashley Willoughby for their indispensable help with *Curry Arts Journal* publicity and distribution; the Student Activities Office for its continued commitment of funding and resources; and Fran Jackson and Rosemarie Valentino of the Office of Institutional Advancement for their expertise and continued support of the *Curry Arts Journal*. We also extend our appreciation to Chief Academic Officer David Potash, Associate Dean Lisa Ijiri, Dean of Faculty Cassandra Horii, Humanities Chair Susan Peterson, English Coordinator Andrew Horn, and Writing Program Director Sandy Kaye for their continued commitment to the *Curry Arts Journal* courses and other initiatives.

Lastly, we would like to thank Professor Karen D'Amato for her unwavering generosity and dedication to the production of *Curry Arts Journal 2011*. Her supportive and caring nature helped us immensely

while creating it. We also extend our thanks to Professor Brian Duchaney who ably led the fall practicum class while Professor D'Amato was on sabbatical. After reading this edition, we hope you will agree that due to our collaborative efforts and the community's endless support, *Curry Arts Journal 2011* is a quality student publication full of original voices and absorbing images.

Sincerely,

Brett Arsenault
Andrew Blom
Richard Capece
Shane Donohue
Brittany Hendricks
Timothy Murphy
Ashley Willoughby
Christopher Wilson
Samuel Zapora

The *Curry Arts Journal* Editors

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Josh Carlsen, "Untitled" Monotype

Rain

By Michaela Powers

It's raining now, but it's probably just a brief storm. It's hard rain, but I don't mind. Rain doesn't scare me, I actually love it. I'm walking out of my building, the sky's a dusky black, and no one is around. My hands are in my pockets, my head is down, and I'm marching to the pitter-patter of the rain. It's peaceful, a raindrop falls on my lips; I smile and keep walking. Everything around me is dark and somber. The trees are saturated, and the drops keep falling from one leaf to the next.

I'm six years old sitting on the couch in my living room staring at the rain. Rain fascinates me; I even like it more than sunny days. My knees are folded, left arm on the back of the couch and head comfortably placed on the top. I'm fixated, motionless, and completely captivated by the storm outside. I forget to blink, and my eyes start to water. I don't move, just rapidly blink until they are satisfied. It is beautifully dangerous, and I just sit and stare.

I'm sitting Indian style on my bed in my college dorm. I'm a sophomore and cramming for an exam. It's 3 a.m., so I should probably get some rest. I put my books on my desk and lie down. I lie there, waiting to fall asleep, but I can't; my roommate is snoring. I kick her, clear my throat so maybe it will startle her and she'll stop. It works and the silence floods my ears like a gushing wild river. I start over, lie down, take a breath and wait to fall asleep, again; it doesn't work. What do I do? Put my headphones in and turn on the sound of rain. The noise is a tranquil, pitter-patter, pitter-patter. It's not a continuous sound like a natural rainstorm, but it works. It runs in a thirty-second pattern, and I lie there paralyzed with pleasure. Usually I hate predictable patterns; I hate sitting still, I hate being bored, but here I am, lying in bed listening to the sound of rain, eventually falling, falling, falling asleep.

Rain's dark, rain's wet, rain's deep, and rain's scary. When it rains people run. People are uncomfortable in the rain, yet it's so magical. When people run from rain I wonder where they are

going. If people don't like to be wet, why do they go swimming? It doesn't make sense. I find rain intriguing, to say the least.

I'm riding on a tour bus in Costa Rica in the middle of a rainstorm. We're driving on the side of a cliff; I'm with my boyfriend and other people on a school trip during our high school spring break. I'm sixteen and staring at the breathtaking environment. There's a waterfall to my left. It's fierce, amazing, powerful, and fast, falling so quick I can't see where it ends. To my right there is a drop; I can't see how far down, but when I look straight ahead at the horizon it's clear if the bus tips we will die. The roads are dirt, and in this thunderstorm the wheels are getting stuck in the mud. I can't think about it, but I can look beyond its danger. Nature is a powerful gift. I stare at the rainforest beyond the drop and everything is green. Not a dead ugly green, but a bright, lively, energetic, emerald green. I rush to grab my camera in hopes of capturing nature in one of its most ravishing moments, but it's not coming out the same. That's just it, a rainstorm is just perfectly magnificent for those who care to stop and notice, but when one tries to save it in a photograph, its seduction slips away.

I'm still walking in the rain to class. My hands are in my pockets, and I just crossed over the bridge with the small river flowing beneath it. I'm in my green rain boots and my black raincoat, with no hood. Can you imagine a raincoat with no hood? Boggles me, too. I don't care. Everybody tells me it looks good, so I let it go. I'm wet, like the rain, probably look like an idiot, but I have to get to class. Everyone else is running or sheltered by an umbrella. As helpful as umbrellas are, they annoy me. They are just these things that people put so much trust and reliance in, and they always break. The smallest gust of wind will snap it, and now you're wet. When you're trying to get on a bus the umbrella always takes twenty minutes to close, and now everyone's glaring at you.

I continue my walk, one foot after another, and proceed forward. I am not careful to avoid the puddles and truck right through them. My book bag is zipped up on my left shoulder, my bare left hand clutches it tightly, and I walk on. It's peaceful out here, the air smells clean just like I stepped out of the shower; it fills my lungs with such content. Rain is not the same as sun in the way that when

it's sunny you feel like it has to be a good day. Sun makes you feel warm and safe, while rain strips you down and exposes what you really are. People can hide in the sun, they can be whoever or whatever they want, but in the rain they can't pretend.

My bed at home is right next to the window. In fact, it is so close that I don't even need a weather report to know if it's going to rain. If I'm sleeping, the sound of rain awakes me; I open my window just enough that I can listen, but not so much that it makes me cold. I lie there scrunched in a ball on my left side, and watch the rain and listen to its symphony. It's so real, so alive, and I just close my eyes and listen to the hushed sounds of pitter-patter, pitter-patter. I could lie there forever, just sitting and listening.

I'm on the lacrosse field. It's raining, but it's not the soothing pitter-patter; it's a mean piercing shower. It's freezing rain, that rain I hate; it's miserable. I have to ask myself, is this the same rain that everyone else seems to run away from? My body is completely drenched, my shoes are filled with water, and my hands are clenched to my stick. I don't even need to ask the question, the answer is written all over their faces. No one wants to be here, but we are all here. I look up to the sky and all I can see are raindrops falling on my face and dripping down my cheek. I don't wipe them because I know rain; I know it won't stop.

Deep breath, it's almost time. I won't move until I hear complete silence. Quietly, I open my window and throw my left leg out. I hold onto the ledge of my window and shuffle my body out. My muscles are tight so I don't fall, but flexible enough to maneuver myself as quickly as possible. I'm fourteen and sneaking out to see my boyfriend who my parents have forbidden me to see. I just got out of my window; I'm standing on my slanted roof two floors up from the ground and I have to jump. It never gets easier, but the danger never stops me. I'm young and in love, and this is the only way I can see him. I'm crouched down and slipping. I let go and fall to the ground. Again, I've made it. I stand up from my catlike position and flee for my freedom. I'm running, and running, and then I'm gone.

It was always quite a challenge to get out without anyone noticing, but somehow I did it. The easiest times were when it would rain. The roaring sounds of raindrops diverted any noise I mistakenly made. It was like the rain was protecting me, allowing me to run, allowing me to go. After all those rainstorms where I would sit and stare in complete awe, I felt like the rain was giving back to me.

I'm a lifeguard in the summer. I have been for about four years now, and every day I work with the most bewitching gift of nature, the ocean. Just like rain, it's deep, dark, and scary. It's an average day, I'm working with my friend at a small beach, and it starts to rain. The most rewarding thing for a lifeguard is not the tan, the view, or the responsibility, but when it rains. People don't come to the beach when it rains, which means we can sit in our cars while the water dribbles down the windshield and still get paid.

Now we decide to spice up our day and have a few drinks. I reach in my friend's trunk and grab two skunked Busch Lights; seems gross, but in my eighteen-year-old mind it doesn't matter. It's raining, actually it looks like a hurricane; the thunder is roaring and lightning just struck. From the ocean it is absolutely astonishing. The colors that come from a lightning strike, blues, grays, whites, and purples, have no Crayola name to label them. It happens so quick you can't even make sense of it. We just stare in amazement, the two of us in her car drinking skunk beer, as happy as two teenage carefree girls could be.

Our friends show up and join the festivities. They decide it would be a great idea to go swimming in the rainstorm. They sprint to the water and jump in. I open my door to run after them, but just stand there. I'm frozen, clenching the door, but watching. My friend the other lifeguard refuses to go; logically, it is not a good idea because we are still on the clock, drinking and decked out in Falmouth Lifeguard gear. Regardless, I want to go in, but I can't. My arm is soaked, pretty much see through at this point, but I'm not annoyed. I just stand there engulfed by the same rain that I have always watched from my window. I have always wanted to be out there, but here I am about to go and I don't move. I'm stuck. I'm in the rain, not running towards it, or from it, just standing in it.

It doesn't make sense to me why I never jumped into the ocean that rainy day. It's like I was at the door and couldn't bring myself to

knock, or was in the car and I couldn't start the ignition. What was holding me back? I wanted to go, I wanted to run. I wanted to run to the fun and happiness, but when I had the chance, I didn't move. I just stood there. My heart pounded with adrenalin, but I didn't move.

I'm almost at class now; I'm walking up the stairs. I'm rushing to get to class but careful not to go so fast that I slip and fall. I walk into the classroom, and it's calm, it's still. It's like a pond, flat but filled with living, breathing creatures. Everyone's already sitting, so I try and find the first empty seat and sit down. I take my coat off, because it's soaked, and put it on the floor. I sit there looking around and realize no one else seems drenched by the obvious storm outside. I don't feel dumb that I'm the only one who's clearly soaked; maybe I've gotten used to that feeling, the feeling of being different, or maybe my presence is as small as a fish in a pond. Nonetheless, I take out my pencil and notepad to begin class. I look around and see a girl twirling her hair and a boy in a green shirt behind her drawing. The boy in front of me is tapping his foot and the teacher is beginning class. Everyone appears to be in their own world, physically here but mentally somewhere else. Class ends and we all leave. I put on my coat and walk outside. It's still raining, and I'm alone.

It's not any different than any other day, and that's just it. It's just rain, so why is everyone running away? Where are they going? I guess I'll never know, but I'm okay with that. I like the rain; it's probably the most authentic thing in my life. When it's mad it screams, when it's sad it cries, and when it's happy it sings. It never lies, and it never promises anything. It's just there, and people can block it with an umbrella or trench right through it. When it rains I never wonder when it's going to end; I just try and face it, even if I don't always succeed. It's a part of life. Rain is the ocean roaring at the coast; rain is the glistening trees. It's the powerful waterfall, stormy night and everything in between to the girl who stopped to watch.



Anthony Cormier, "A Moment" Digital Print

The Light Blue Mist

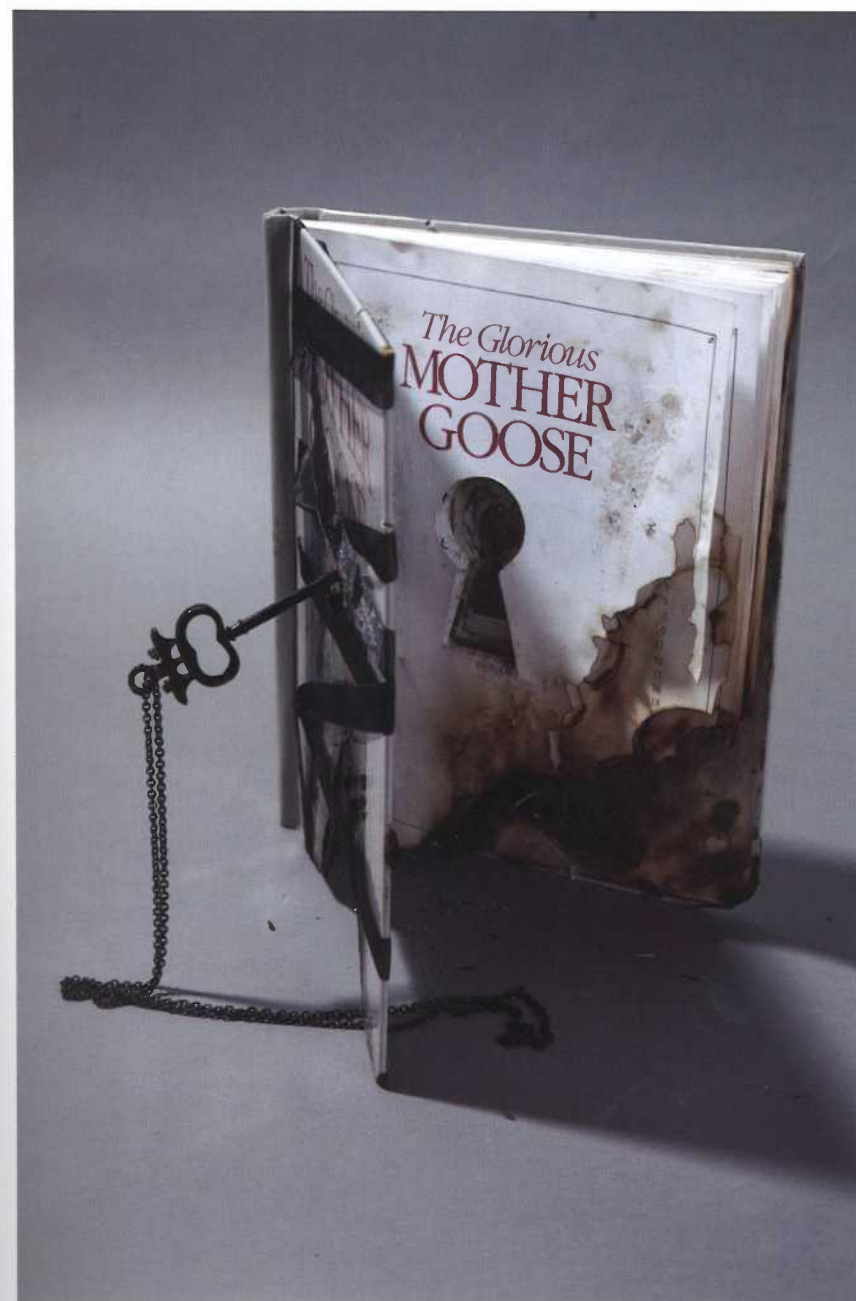
By Michael Grady

The light blue mist moves in
 Fluid in motion, air to eye,
 Fluid to touch, to sense
 Roiling off the stark navy blue ocean.
 Nothing glimmers through the mist
 But cobalt and platinum hair,
 Filaments of air made shining
 And phosphorescent glow.
 Luminous neon lips flash
 The faraway shore,
 Afar from any electric light of man,
 Her form a delicate
 Contrast against the haze,
 Light mist crawling in from the tides,
 Earliest of morning light
 Peaking through fog.
 Glowing bright mist
 Contrasts the golden-eyed
 Creature, angel of man
 Draped in the soft
 Soft light
 Of day stolen
 Into the night,
 Always the girl
 Poised on the edge of dawn.

Untitled

By Alexandra McGinnis

We kicked off our shoes
to sink our toes into Astroturf,
the patent leather sky
stretching out luxuriously
mere inches from our upraised palms.
A world so malleable
incomprehension is mistaken for religion.
Serene cityscapes beckon
from outside my imaginary window
only to falter
and flicker to a roll of closing credits
as I am left in mid-air
jumping
to test the sincerity of a promise.
A mass consciousness
slumbering to inevitable fantasies.
A life that fits neatly into the space
of two hours
accentuated and devastated
by punch lines and a happy ending.
A nation constantly slipping
in and out of feverish realities,
ears skillfully trained
to comprehend only what is thrust
upon them—
brutality so harsh
it is mistaken for delicacy.
A world in which perfection
seems far too overused
and originality has become
unoriginal.
With timeless elegance,
history repeats.



Candace Cobuzzi, "Untitled" Mixed Media Artist's Book

The Bishop Trial

By Timothy Murphy

"The Bishop Trial" centers on a character named Carl Bishop who serves as a magistrate in the city of Boston in the mid-1800s. Bishop is known throughout the city for his unfeeling nature, and he is infamous for the cruel punishments he administers unto hapless criminals. Carl is resolved that he will never look upon the faces of any of the prisoners with any sort of distinction, allowing all to appear as a uniform mask of despair. One night, a prisoner initiates a fight with another inmate, and the guards resultantly bring him in shackles onto the street in front of the prison. Carl approaches the man, inquiring who he is and why he is so hysterical. The man begins to speak of an urgent message he needs to deliver to the town of Revere. Carl responds by cruelly handing the man a rusted saw and telling him that it will allow him to leave any time he wants. Carl leaves the man in a frantic state, exclaiming of the immediate necessity of traveling to Revere. Carl turns from the man and ventures home, certain that the man will be there the next morning in exactly the same condition. However, when Carl returns the following morning, he learns that the man has severed his hand and lies dead several feet away. Carl is aghast, unable to rationalize this man's final act as he retrieves a letter destined for Revere from the man's pocket. Several scenes unfold, wherein Carl is forced to recognize the full extent of this man's tragic result and eventually realize that he must attempt to fulfill the man's last wish, delivering the letter to Revere.

Carl had begun his journey early in the morning, before anyone had awoken for the day. The morning had initially been blotted by voluminous clouds but eventually cleared. Having packed a few necessities, he carried them in a small bag hanging from his shoulder. He brought a single change of clothes, but he did not expect to spend the night anywhere but his home. He chose to walk to his destination, imitating the actions of the dead prisoner closely as he could, in the hopes of somehow fulfilling the man's interrupted aspirations. He had been to Revere as a young man and felt that he knew the path, for he experienced a distant recognition as he passed every notable landmark. He recalled the windmill that stood in the center of a spacious field. He passed a farm that was once

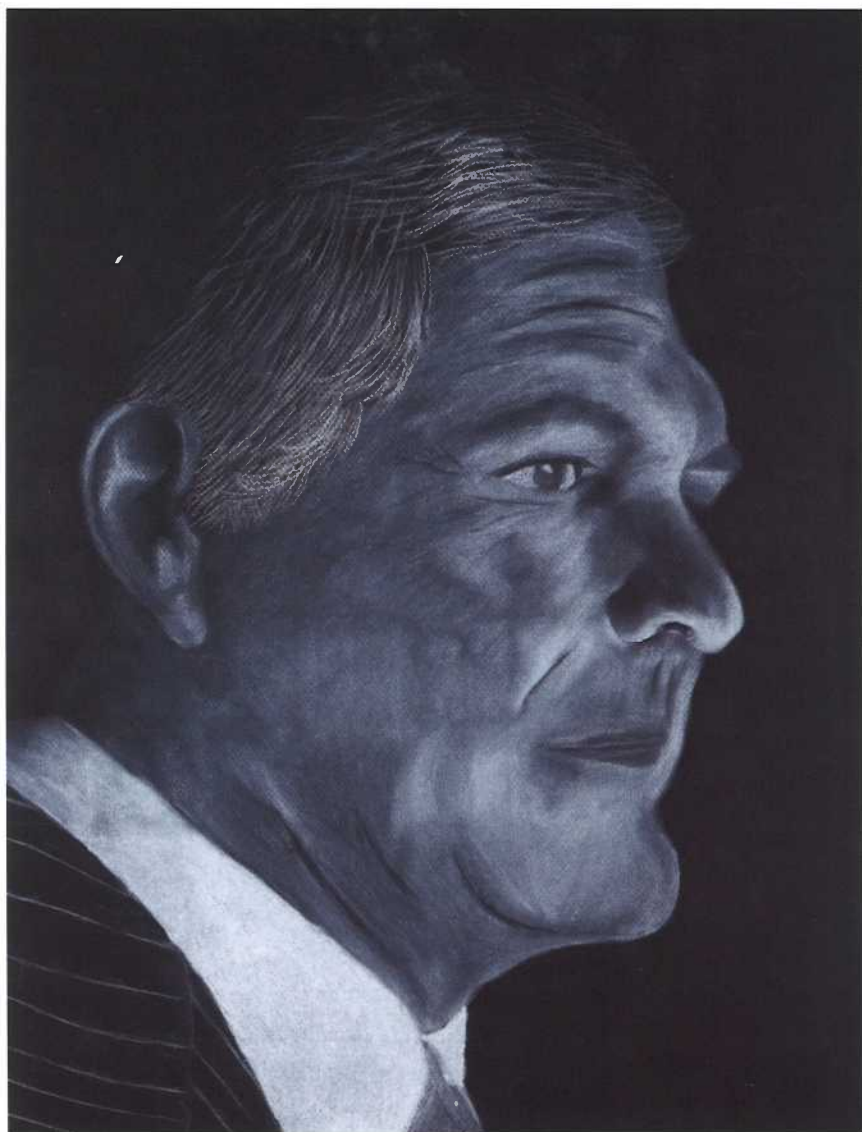
filled with activity, with various animals and crops permeating the property; this farm was now abandoned and seemed to be greatly weathered during his relatively brief hiatus. He even remembered the way the dirt shot from his boots into the air with every step, forming a cloud that quickly vanished into the breeze. There was the slight fear that he was not walking in the right direction, and that perhaps his memory was false. It seemed that Carl had shed himself of logic or reason, and only wished to atone for his crimes. He felt that he was on a fateful journey on which he alone must embark, and that he would be guided by something greater than himself, a force that presided over the petty affairs of lost but hopeful men. He felt that he approached the town, and he knew that he would recognize it once he arrived.

Carl did not pass anyone during his walk, which led him to believe that he had taken some obscure, uncharted road. The afternoon had blossomed into a pleasant, serene day, as the sun spread throughout the land, and a gentle breeze supplied animation to any dormant feature. The snow had melted from the previous day, revealing the picturesque traits that bordered the dirt road. Carl discerned billowing smoke in the distance, and as he got closer to the source, the town of Revere was within his sight. The first person he encountered was on the outskirts of the town, a man shedding the grass beside his house. The town had clearly been alienated from any advanced civilization. They were dressed in modest attire, and they seemed to move at a pace all their own. Carl felt suspicious eyes surround him as he walked down the road. The inhabitants of this town seemed to be unfamiliar with any person from the city taking an interest in their town. Carl felt that he should divert from the road, so as to appear less of a spectacle. He observed his surroundings and spotted a tavern up the road. He swiftly walked towards the tavern to escape the attention of the town.

He entered the tavern and made his way to the bar. The barkeep noticed his arrival and walked over to him. "What would you like, stranger?" asked the barkeep.

Carl found it best to appear casual and order a drink. "I would just like cranberry juice. It's a little early to be drinking."

The barkeep smiled. "Tell that to these guys." The barkeep motioned to the various men scattered around the bar.



Tim McNamara, "Politics" Conte Crayon Drawing

The man to Carl's left turned and scrutinized him. "I like your shirt," he said amiably.

The young, stalwart man seemed to be fully cognizant and clearly did not indulge in any alcohol. He had dirty hands and cheap clothing, which indicated that he was a manual worker, perhaps hydrating himself while on break.

"Thanks," responded Carl.

The barkeep returned and handed Carl his drink.

"You're not from around here?" said the man curiously.

"No."

"Look at that haircut. You're a city man, aren't you?"

"How'd you know?" replied Carl jeeringly.

"Boston?"

"That's right," answered Carl irritably.

"I'm sorry, look at my manners. I'm interrogating a man without introducing myself. My name is Edward." He extended his hand and they exchanged a handshake. "I don't mean to be intrusive. We just clearly don't get visitors," said Edward.

"I see."

"I've never been to Boston myself. Nasty city I hear."

"I guess that depends whom you ask," responded Carl rapidly.

"Well, I'm asking you. What do you think of it?"

Carl thought for a moment. "I grew up in London. It has the same filth. I guess I wouldn't recommend it."

"Well, I can't stand the country. I guess it depends where you grow up."

"I suppose."

Edward noticed that Carl replied without any investment in his words, and that his mind was clearly occupied on some crucial matter. Edward could not help but become interested. "So what brings you here?"

Carl hesitated while assessing the most suitable method of finding Lucille, not knowing who she was and possessing no tangible association to her. Carl decided to ask Edward, whose genial demeanor compelled Carl to trust him. "I'm actually trying to find someone. Do you know of a person named Lucille?"

The mention of her name instantly shifted Edward's expression; his face became rigid and lost all the merry animation he had previously displayed. "What do you want with her?"

Noticing the sudden shift in mood, Carl approached his following statements tactfully. "I have a message for her."

"Who are you?"

"I'm a friend of the family. Her relative has just passed away unfortunately."

The man stammered and took swig of his drink, unsure of any other action.

"Can I see her?" asked Carl.

"You don't know..." said Edward gloomily.

"Know what?"

It was at this moment that a young, tenuous man sulked into the tavern and slowly approached the bar. His hair was disheveled and his face looked worn by some tremendous burden. Edward had become even more exasperated at the sight of the man, his eyes darting between Carl and this newcomer. The man looked towards Edward in recognition, immediately observing his distress. "What's wrong, Edward?" asked the man.

"Roger...this man wants to speak with Lucille."

Roger's eyes were immediately fixed on Carl. Carl knew that there swelled some passion within this man regarding his presence, but he could not positively identify its nature. Roger was no longer concerned with any other aspect of the room, and was seemingly intent on gaining some knowledge of Carl's motives through his mannerisms and outward appearance. "Is that so?" said Roger.

"Sir, I have no bad intentions. I simply wish to speak to her."

"What is your name?" sternly asked Roger.

"Carl..."

"Well, Carl, would you like to discuss this outside. This does not seem to concern anyone else."

"Who are you?" frankly asked Carl.

"I'm her husband."

Carl thought for a moment and allowed the man to lead him outside. Behind this building lay a patch of grass which continued to the forest; a gentle breeze swayed the bare branches, and the grass shimmered in the expansive sunlight. Carl stopped for a moment to look at the trees, their sudden burst of vitality, before he felt a forceful tug on his hair. His body was thrown against the building, and he felt something held firmly against his throat. Roger's expression had become violent and maniacal, as Carl noticed that he held a knife against his throat, showing no reluctance to use it if he found it necessary.

"What are doing?" calmly asked Carl.

"I told you what I'd do."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't play games with me. You're going to make me do it?" spoke Roger abhorrently.

"Do what!?"

"Kill you."

Carl felt that insanity was apparent upon this man's face, and that any errant response could initiate his death.

"You have mistaken me for someone else! I've never been here, and I've never met your wife!" pleaded Carl.

"Yet you come from the city to speak to her. Believe me, I can tell from your clothes."

"I have come from the city. But what does that mean?"

"Why have you come?"

"To deliver a letter."

Roger momentarily relinquished his combative demeanor while considering this response; he quickly reinitiated his interrogation.

"From whom?" asked Roger.

"I don't know. A man..."

"You don't know him, yet you deliver a letter for him?"

"It was his dying wish!"

Roger again paused for a moment of contemplation. Carl attempted to elaborate.

"A man was found dead in the street yesterday, in Boston. All he had was this letter. All anyone knows is that he wanted it delivered to your wife."

"And you have this letter?"

"It's in my front pocket."

Roger reached into Carl's pocket and felt for the letter. After a moment of rummaging, he pulled it out, holding it beneath the bright sunlight. He scrutinized it with a stoic expression while the implications of its condition filed through his mind. He blinked repeatedly, and it appeared that the letter slightly trembled in his hand. The blood-soaked letter seemed to legitimize Carl's claims to some degree. "I'll take it to her," said Roger.

"No."

"I insist."

"You can kill me if you must, but I have to take that to her. It can't be anyone else."

"Why?" asked Roger in puzzlement.

"The same reason I was the one who had to bring it this far."

The conviction with which Carl spoke his words were testament to his grand task, and Roger seemed to recognize something genuine in Carl's motives. Roger had calmed himself and spoke methodically. "There's something you must know," said Roger solemnly. "Lucille is dying."

Carl did not speak, and waited for Roger to speak more on the subject.

"A few days ago, a man came claiming that he worked for the government. He told her that she owed them money. Taxes accumulated over many years. They waited till now to address it. She's on her deathbed, and they speak to her like a criminal, like she has it coming to her. I told them I would kill them if they came back; I meant it."

Roger released his grip on Carl's neck, and withdrew the knife. He turned and looked to the forest, his mind traveling somewhere deep within leaves and far beyond the sky. He turned back to Carl with tears forming in his eyes. "Now you say that you are not one of these men that wish to label my wife, my love, a criminal before she dies. You speak the truth to me?"

"I never tell lies," said Carl sincerely.

Roger thought for a moment. "I'll allow you to see her. But I want you to know something."

"What?"

"You cause her any more pain than she's already in, I will kill you."

"I understand."

Roger began to walk away as Carl followed. He took several steps before he halted, turning to Carl. "I apologize for the incident with the knife. I sometimes let my emotions get the best of me."

"I understand."

They began to walk in the direction Roger led. They passed through the town without any delay and continued up the dirt road leading away from it. Neither man spoke as they progressed down the road, and Roger did not gaze in Carl's direction at any point. Carl found it peculiar that Roger had let his guard down, that he suddenly did not feel the need to monitor his behavior. It appeared

to Carl that this man's nature did not match his behavior, and that there existed something far more beneficent behind his maddened glare. Roger looked despondently towards the soil on which he walked, his mind receding deep into some horrific enigma, a puzzle that had no pleasant solution. Carl now witnessed a tranquil, reserved man— a man who did not appear as though he was capable of inflicting pain unto anyone else. His violent temperament did not seem to be a perennial state, for he did not resemble the maniacal figure that had threatened Carl's life only a few moments earlier. Carl felt that Roger had walked this path throughout his life before this moment, but there seemed to be something awkward in his steps, something unfamiliar about the path he now took. Roger's steps were taken indecisively, as though his former nature, whatever it had been, sporadically attempted to transcend the savage persona that now enshrouded him. Carl walked beside a man stripped of his natural character, obscured by a grim visage. It was clear that Carl would soon discover what brought on this transformation.

They approached the house which was located slightly off the road, at the end of a dirt path. Roger led Carl into the house without speaking a word. He turned to Carl. "Wait here."

Roger entered a room that was ajar, and closed it behind him. Carl took this moment to observe the surrounds. The house was perfectly kept and it was clear that someone invested much effort to uphold its appearance. The couch pillows were all arranged in a designed fashion, and it seemed every piece of useless decoration was turned at specific angles throughout the room, as though it were the work of an insane artist. Carl felt that a room this tidy was kept in such a condition out of desperation, as though it were an attempt to compensate for some other ghastly presence. Carl suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to leave this room.

Roger returned and positioned himself in front of Carl, looking straight into his eyes. "Just remember what I said," said Roger.

Carl nodded and walked past Roger, entering the room quietly. Carl took a step inside and did not advance any further, unsure what he was about to encounter. A stream of sunlight, directed to the floor beside Lucille's bed, seeped into the otherwise dimly lit room. Lucille lay inert in the shadows.

"Roger said that you wish to speak to me," said Lucille infirmly.

Carl approached the bed to gain a better perspective of Lucille. He stood for a moment, unable to speak, scrutinizing Lucille's

image. Her eyes were not directed at Carl but looked upward toward the ceiling. She breathed laboriously, seeming to grow weaker and more uncomfortable with each passing moment. Her hair was disheveled and appeared filthy. Her skin lacked any color, and one would not assume that she was alive had she not been moving. Carl looked towards her face, imagining her appearance before it was compromised by her present state. He observed her struggle to breathe, the realization of her deteriorating body, and he sensed an indomitable pride that would not perish even in her most agonizing moment. Carl knew that she had once been beautiful, that she once walked this earth on some intrepid path, but that she was now detained by this ineluctable sickness, a tragedy out of her hands.

"I've come to deliver a message," said Carl.

"You have to speak up. I'm dying, you see," said Lucille.

"I've come to deliver a message."

She turned her head towards Carl for a moment, before redirecting her gaze at the ceiling. "And this message couldn't wait?" she said almost jeeringly.

"No."

Lucille turned her head again in Carl's direction, but her attention was focused on the window and the trees that rustled in the wind.

"I haven't been outside in weeks. I can't walk anymore," said Lucille.

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"I used to walk the dirt path as a child. What it is like now?"

"It's beautiful."

Lucille thought for moment, as though taking a moment to envision the path. She then sighed and continued her direct tone. "So what is this message you speak of?"

"It's actually a letter. I don't know what it says."

"Who is it from?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know who it is from?" asked Lucille in disbelief.

"No. He died before I could find out."

Lucille's expression became morbid, and there emerged an apprehension on her face.

"I think you should just read it." Carl took the letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

She held it in her hand, scrutinizing its condition in horror.

"What happened!?" exclaimed Lucille.

"The man did it to himself."

"Why would he do that?"

"He was shackled, he needed to get away. He cut his own hand off."

Carl had not until that moment recapitulated the events that took place that morning and felt that he could vomit after speaking of it.

"Why was he shackled?!" demanded Lucille.

"He broke the law..."

"What did he do!?"

"He got in a bar fight."

Lucille eyes darted around the room as she considered who this man could possibly be. She took a closer look at the letter and scrutinized the very distinct handwriting that spelled "Lucille". She now settled on a single individual from her distant past.

"Matthew... It's Matthew. He used to write me letters. Beautiful letters. He always signed my name like this. It must be him."

Lucille clutched the letter tightly while an expression of anguish arose on her face. "He was alive. It's been ten years. I don't believe it. This whole time!" She displayed a moment of astonishment before her face settled back into despair, as she reminded herself of the horrific incident that inspired this meeting.

"Who let Matthew die this way?"

"I did."

Lucille considered Carl's confession for a moment before her eyes straightened into a hateful glare. She could no more speak directly to Carl, and merely looked upon him as though he were a man not deserving of any acknowledgement that he was human. Carl continued to speak. "He needed to deliver this message to you. I shackled him and he cut his hand off to get it to you. It was my fault...it was my fault."

A silence lingered in the room while Carl sat without speaking. Lucille looked blankly at the letter before she began to open it. She cast the envelope to her side and unfolded the letter. She perused its writing before displaying a hysterical expression. "What does it say!? The blood has soaked the ink. Oh no. Matthew! My dear Matthew!"

Lucille turned to her side, grasping the letter while bemoaning her beloved, and was suddenly stricken with pain that far surpassed

her sickness: she now suffered from an affliction that could not be remedied. She pictured Matthew, and the torment he suffered on her behalf for a message that would be lost in his death. She curled into a fetal position, with her arms wrapped around the letter, as though she held Matthew himself. She futilely wished that she had been there when he died, to grasp him as she now did the letter. She had no doubt that he pictured her in his final moments, resigned that he could not address the mistakes he had made, the events that had alienated them for so long. She had suddenly become beset by circumstances that she could not change, by things that were now in the past, and she regrettably had no future. Carl did not move, merely standing over her, while her exclamations resounded throughout the house.

Roger entered the room and hastily positioned himself over Lucille. "What is wrong?"

"Matthew! He was alive! They told me he was dead," screamed Lucille.

A morbid expression suddenly arose on Roger's face as he turned pale and lost all animation. He fearfully stood without speaking.

"Did you know he was alive?" frantically asked Lucille.

"Yes."

A moment passed while Lucille scrutinized her husband, aghast at what she had been told.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It was for your own good," blankly responded Roger.

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't my idea. I just cared about you so much," said Roger plaintively.

"What have you done?"

Roger stood silently for a moment, turning to Carl who stood in the corner before turning back to Lucille. "It was your father. He came to me with the idea. He knew how fond I was of you. He told me about Matthew, about his gambling debts, his disgusting behavior. It was none of my concern until he told me that you had fallen for him. That you couldn't be persuaded to leave him. He would have taken you down with him. It was only a matter of time. That's when your father decided to act." Roger paused for a moment and continued. "He paid Matthew to disappear, to act as though he had died. It didn't take much. He accepted the offer."

Lucille looked to Roger in disbelief, attempting to generate some sort of response to this tale but unable to find the appropriate words. She lay in silence, vacantly staring at her husband.

"I only did this because I loved you, Lucille. I always have, since we were children. I couldn't let you stay with him. I just couldn't."

"You lied to me!" shot Lucille, as she seemed on the verge of a violent fit.

"I had to! He didn't deserve you. He was filth! Who knows how poor his life had gotten?" Roger turned to Carl. "When you found him, how would you judge him?"

Carl seemed startled momentarily before responding. "He had no identification. No money. It seemed like he had no family. He had nothing. He looked like a drifter."

"You see? He died yesterday because he had nothing."

"He had me! He loved me!"

"Then why did he take the money? He took the money over you. That's what type of man he was." Roger walked to the bed, kneeling down and taking Lucille's hand. "Think about all we have, all we've accomplished. Please, don't forget our love, the moments we shared. Nothing can ever change that."

Lucille threw Roger's hands from hers, and screamed scornfully at him. "Get away from me! I hate you! Get away! Oh, Matthew, my dear Matthew."

"You don't mean that! Please, Lucille. Don't say that."

Lucille did not answer, turning from her husband as her words became unintelligible. She released an agonizing scream, speaking Matthew's name repeatedly and clutching the letter. She could not be consoled, and she could not stand the sight of her husband. She now realized that while facing death, in the closing moments of her life, there was not a single face to which she could gaze with an authentic, affectionate expression. Roger turned to Carl with forlorn eyes. Carl was prepared to receive whatever words or actions Roger wished to bestow on him.

"I want you to leave."

Carl left the room without speaking a word as the insane cries of Lucille projected throughout the house, reaching hauntingly into the sunlight before drowning in the breeze.

It was nighttime as Carl entered the city. The city was still, and Carl passed only a few inhabitants as he traveled the various

roads. Realizing that he had not prepared for the night and the frigid wind that accompanied it, he rubbed his arms and mustered warmth from his breath, but did not invest much thought into the matter. His mind was far too active to be distracted by his physical discomfort. Carl spent the entirety of his journey home with the task of rationalizing some favorable interpretation of what he had witnessed that day, of finding something uplifting to extract for a promising future. The roads had rarely felt so empty, and never had he wished more for company than at that moment. He longed to pour his heart out to any person capable of understanding the painful burden now lying on his shoulder. He considered yelling to his surroundings, projecting an expression that might alleviate the multiplicity of his plaintive thoughts. The streets were covered in filth and Carl forged past the unsettling sights of the night. He passed a man that lay in the refuse on the side of the road. A wild dog scurried past him with an object lodged in his mouth. He looked above to view the clock tower, but he could not read the time. Knowing that it must be the incipient hours of the morning, Carl quickened his pace while he pictured his warm bed.

As Carl turned the corner onto that same daunting street, there beneath the lamplight stood his nameless beloved. He stood observing her beautiful form, and as he had done countless times before considered his possible options of evading her. He was prepared to turn and retreat as he always did, but there emerged a newly discovered character that did not fear such confrontations. He had never imagined taking such an intrepid leap, but he did not feel as though he was the same man who had fearfully wandered the city only a few nights prior. There was a sudden conviction that he must advance. He had shed himself of all restraint, having witnessed the grandest evils possible of a merciless fortune and now knowing what it was that he truly needed to fear. The wind gusted at his back as he walked towards her, his feet echoing throughout the quiescent road.

She had not noticed his approach and only turned her head towards him as he stood directly in front of her. Carl had never stood this close to her, and never had he been able to stare directly into her eyes. The lamplight spread across her face in a fractured alignment, as her bangs created various shadows that mingled with her striking features. He felt that he could tremble, that he possessed

no words suitable to punctuate this prolonged, vulnerable moment. She apparently noticed his discomfort and felt that she should address him.

"Are you lost, sir?" she said kindly.

"No, I was actually on my way home. I just see you here a lot."

"Really?"

"Yes...do you need someone to accompany you?" She did not answer immediately and Carl quickly elaborated. "It just doesn't seem like a safe place for a woman at night."

She smiled, seemingly withholding laughter. "You don't have to worry about me. I really find nighttime to be quite lovely. I can handle myself."

"I see," said Carl.

"But I would love company. Just not for protection," she said smiling.

After a pause, Carl asked, "What is your name?"

"Rebecca. And yours?"

"My name is Carl. It sure is nice to finally know your name. As I said, I've seen you here at night. You are always alone."

"I guess I haven't been. We just never spoke to each other," Rebecca said gaily.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Why are you always out here?"

Rebecca thought for a moment before answering. "I suppose there is something about the night that calms me. I feel like I belong here. I don't know if I can fully explain."

"You don't need to."

Carl felt that their brief interaction had brought them closer, almost to an intimate level consisting of a mutual understanding. She looked to Carl with sincere eyes, speaking with an earnest tone. "Would you like to walk with me?" she asked.

She arose from the bench and they began walking casually down the road. They did not hesitate to reveal their mysterious characters, and they spoke with the knowledge that the other party appreciated their every insignificant word. Carl's voice gained a fervor that derived from the approach of some divine answer, as though he was on the verge of discovering every magnificent detail of her life. Carl no longer thought of the horrors that had once plagued him, the noxious reverberations seeping from the past.



Carl was even sure that if he were to divulge his crimes and lay his full character on display for Rebecca to see, she would likely show gratitude for a better understanding of her new companion. Carl had never realized that amidst these streets a convalescent form awaited his approach. The image of her face, the smile that emerged periodically as he spoke, had displaced the atrocious visions that bolstered the weight of his crimes. Her voice projected into the darkness, supplying a new persona to the once daunting city, and creating order within the pathways of its luminous, ceaseless design.

They turned the corner onto a street with some animation, as there were several windows that were brightly illuminated from the inside. There were multiple people present on this road, all seemingly under some rapturous desire not to sleep. The individuals on the road had amassed themselves into various groups. They all spoke loudly, and these statements were met with laughter from their companions. Rebecca had wrapped herself around Carl's arm, noticing that his body shivered. "We need to get you inside."

They turned into a café, surprisingly still open with servers. They were led to a table positioned beside a fireplace. The flickering glow spread across Rebecca's face, and her expression suddenly seemed solemn, having lost the merriment she once displayed under the starlight. The light from the fire shimmered erratically as Rebecca's features seemed to transition into a sullen, veiled stranger for every fleeting moment unlit by the fire. There no longer remained the diffidence of being newly acquainted, and Carl felt that something should be said to match the dim, phantasmal setting.

"There's something I need to tell you," said Carl solemnly.

"What is it?"

"You don't know everything about me."

"No," she replied blankly.

"How do you know I'm a good man?"

"I suppose I have an eye for this sort of thing."

"What a man has done in the past is not written on his face."

"I'm not sure that a man's past is what defines him," replied Rebecca plainly.

Carl looked downward towards the table as he became visibly shaken, with tears forming in his eyes.

"I have done things...horrible things. I—"

Rebecca reached her hand forth to grasp his as a soothing understanding became visible on her face.

"It doesn't matter now. Leave it in the past. It's time to start new."

They left the café after much time had passed. Their conversation had eventually regained its levity, and they spent the time talking of trivial things. They stepped into the street to notice that there was no longer anyone else there. Rebecca took a moment to survey the surroundings before walking in a definite path which Carl followed without question. Rebecca's compassionate words resonated within Carl's mind, and the personal retelling of her statements gave her words an overwhelming sway. He had not until that moment believed it possible to escape the past, to shed the grotesque mask he had worn in service to his crimes. He reached beside him to grasp her hand. The warmth of her hand reminded him of her indefatigable life, her loving presence that did not falter in the midst of the most horrific confession. Carl looked to the horizon, towards the endless night, and envisioned a permanent dawn rising to relieve the landscape of its monstrous form. He felt the coming of a new light, and a transformation that would place him inviolate from the lamentable details of his former life.

They turned onto a road that ran beside the river. She walked over towards the rail bordering the water, looking off to the distance. The water was dark except for the areas exposed by a subtle reflection. Across the river, various lights from the city spread across the pitch black water. Carl looked downward; unable to discern the water, he felt as though he stared straight into a bottomless chasm. Carl was unsure what it was she searched for in the distance. A breeze cast her hair into a tumult, violently fluttering it throughout her face. Her eyes suddenly looked upward, as a slight smile became apparent.

"I think it might snow."

She then took Carl's hand and led him into a nearby apartment building. They entered quietly and slowly made their way up the stairs. Carl could not see anything in the dark hallways and followed the path led by Rebecca. They came to a doorway, and after unhinging several locks, she led him in. She closed the door lightly, so as to avoid waking any tenants. Carl now stood in a small, worn apartment, seemingly only consisting of the bed in the center of an unkempt room. She walked to the center of the room while Carl

awkwardly stared at her, unable to say anything. She then turned and walked towards the window, standing gleefully beside it.

"Come here. I want you to see something," said Rebecca.

Carl walked towards the window and stood beside her. She motioned out the window, through which they were able to view the expanse of the city. Carl traced the path of the river, which cut directly through the city and continued into the unknown distance. There portions of the city were still lit, but a majority of the animation seen in the daytime had receded. A thick, capacious cloud had settled overhead, and the only illumination was that of the sparse lamplights scattered amongst the lifeless buildings. The city overshadowed by the impending storm reminded Carl of the draining experiences of all walks of life. At that moment, there seemed to be a lapse in Carl's reason, as he was unable to reconcile this majestic image with the banal apartment in which he stood.

He turned his head to view Rebecca's face, which was entranced by the sight before them. There seemed to emanate the exact amount of light for Carl to distinguish her facial features, her eyes that glistened without an identifiable source. Carl felt a complete tranquility as he leaned his head forward, sensing only the warmth of her soft skin amidst the darkness of the room, and embraced her tightly, ignorant to a time or place, clinging to this position that elevated his senses towards an illusory mark. Carl was lost in the moment, estranged from the particular details that brought him to this point. He did not wish to part from her grasp, as the world had collapsed beyond her intimate touch, an infinite brilliance captured in a single touch.

There was a sudden resistance by Rebecca, as she severed their embrace and stepped back. "I hate to mention this now," she said.

"Mention what?"

She hesitated. "The money."

"What are you talking about?"

Carl noticed that something had altered in Rebecca's demeanor.

"You don't have to pay me now," she said meekly.

"Pay you for what?!" demanded Carl.

Rebecca recognized the nature of Carl's frantic expression and spoke methodically, not wishing to further his frenzied state. "What did you think this was?"

Carl stood in horror as he slowly realized the meaning of her statements and glared at Rebecca with an emotionless expression,



unable to speak. He could not view Rebecca's reaction to his panic, for she had retreated into the darkest corner, the sound of her breaths the only indication that she was still present. Carl was left with a conflicted mind, as the truth of Rebecca contended with the lofty position she once held. He knew now that his assessment of her had been false, that the loving moments they just shared were counterfeit, a torturous game at his expense. He looked to the door and felt that he should leave, but it seemed that he could not take the necessary steps. It appeared that he was not ready to jettison the invaluable dreams he had, for a brief moment, attributed to her. He was stricken with a feeling of loss as he realized the woman with whom he pictured a promising future never truly existed. He felt helpless, disarmed and dispirited without a familiar path, forsaken in a landscape of deranged, uniform shapes. Finally, he turned and walked towards the door, taking one parting glance into the corner, and exited without speaking a word. Rushing out of the apartment building, he walked straight into the nearby railing, without a destination or any clear motive.

He stood before the river, dimly lit by the luminous city, while snow began to fall softly in an endless sequence. He marveled at the brilliant display, attempting to trace the path of each flake as it descended and dissipated into the opaque water. Carl pictured Matthew and Lucille and how brightly they had shone amidst the darkness, eventually vanishing into cold, bare graves. Carl had seen the descent of the effulgent pioneers, those who traveled beyond the grey fog, who danced in an unbridled night before perishing for their crimes. This display arrested Carl into a motionless posture, an expression of recognition at finally observing the hopeless trajectory of those mad, inspired souls. He had reached for a position in the promising unknown, in the unchecked mayhem that is allowed to those beneath that voluminous cloud. Carl felt his legs falter beneath him; he suddenly felt a frigid breeze that caused him to shiver once again. He turned from the river to escape his pain, to retire to his home and retreat into a placid dream. He called a passing carriage which abruptly stopped. Before Carl entered the carriage, he took one lasting glance towards the river, at the snow that fell from an interminable night, ever so lightly, from a great height.



Andrea Stenson, "Tree of Life" Black and White Photography

Dance of the Still

By Brittany Capozzi

You only exist in letters
on the granite stone
Weathering through seasons
your heart melts into the heart of Earth

You are confined under beauty—
lilacs, bleeding hearts and bluebells
But even in death
your spirit hugs life

your arms
embrace through winds
the newborn leaves and renewed grass
the hair of Earth
You waltz with nature

The eyes of Earth—
the sun and moon—
stare down at Spring's
open season
No clouds blink an inkling of snow

On the upside down ladle hill
a school of American flags wave
by the flooded pond
like paper tails of veteran fish
You tango with the country

A spice finch dips its beak
toward the ground
trilling an operatic melody
like cascading waves from a fountain

You sing outside that
mute music box—
that horizontal tower of a casket

Who says you can't live
when you're dead?

The Guitar Player

By Richard Guerra

"Hey listen, Ted," I hear Marie say after we've laughed for a few moments. I've just made quite the witty remark over the phone and I'm enjoying the fact that she's having such a good time with me.

"Yeah?" I reply still smiling to myself.

"I've had a great time getting to know you and I really like you a lot, but"—and her words sound so rehearsed like she practiced saying them to herself before she called me—"there are things about myself that I still need to figure out, so I don't think I'm quite ready to have a relationship just yet."

"Okay," I reply. I know nothing I say will change her mind. She's already weighed what she likes and dislikes about me and has come to the conclusion that I am not worth her while and that this is the best way to end things with me.

"I'm sorry," she goes on. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I say.

"You're a really nice guy and I'd like to still be friends. I don't know what else to say."

"You don't need to say anything else," I tell her. Because I've been down this road before. They always tell me how great I am and how they want to still be friends, but there's never a clear answer why they don't want to be anything more than friends. And I know there's no point in arguing further or trying to make them give me a real reason because it will only end badly.

I have, however, developed a theory. I am so much of a good guy that I am too good for women to want to have a relationship with me. Because being in a relationship would mean that we will have to break up at some point in the future. Unless we plan on getting married and spending the rest of our lives with each other, the relationship will have to come to an end somehow. And after you break up from a relationship, it is very hard to stay friends. So since women enjoy me to such a high degree, they don't ever want to reach the point that they won't hang out with me anymore. And once they realize that I'm the sort of person that they would really enjoy hanging out with, that's when they break things off with me before they get started. They try to salvage a friendship before it turns into a relationship.



Jake Silins, "Rapture" Acrylic on Canvas

I open my guitar case. I don't have a guitar stand for my guitar. The guy who sold me my guitar tried to get me to buy a guitar stand and I turned him down. When I'm not using my guitar I can just put it in the case. Guitar stands are for guys who want to show off the fact that they have a guitar. I look at the glimmering silver pegs at the end of the neck and the way the patterns on the strap compliment the tan color of the body. I look at how the sunlight sparkles on the shiny ring around the hole. The guy who sold me the guitar called the shiny ring a mother-of-pearl-something that I don't remember. I frequently like to leave the case open so I can see my guitar because it's very visually appealing. It makes me want to play it.

I put the body of the guitar on my right thigh and realize immediately that I have my keys in my right pant pocket. It's very irritating to play with the guitar pressing down on the sharp keys in my pocket. So I switch the keys to my other pocket and proceed to put the strap over my head. Of course, the strap twists up where it connects to the bottom of the guitar, and so I have to untwist it a few times before I get the strap to smooth out.

I put on my thumb pick and feel how it's just a little too tight on the end of my thumb. I listen to the satisfying sound of the squeak my fingers make as I run them along the strings. I press my fingers on the strings to make an A-minor chord and start to strum with the thumb pick. I play a simple song that I've known for years. I figured it out really quickly when I first started playing and I was really impressed with myself for a while. Of course, eventually I learned that a million other contemporary songs have the same chord progression as this song. But I play it anyway because it's so familiar to me and incredibly easy to play. Maybe it would be more impressive if I could sing the words while I play the chords, but I'm not much of a singer. And even when I try to sing quietly to myself it throws off my rhythm and I mess up the strumming. It's something I need to practice I guess.

It's the next day and I'm walking to my writing class. I enjoy the teacher and I enjoy what I write, so I guess it's something to look forward to. I see a girl named Alyssa whose friends are friends with some of my friends so I sort of know her. She has a very pretty face. She's not drop-dead-gorgeous can't-take-my-eyes-off-her, but she has very nice features. I generally like it when women have longer

hair than shorter hair and Alyssa doesn't have very long hair. But she's slender and has very clear skin and she doesn't have any weird facial features like giant teeth or some disproportionate nose. She also doesn't have that horrifying overly tanned orange skin with the dyed-black-hair look that has mysteriously become so popular.

"Hey, how you doing?" I say to her as we pass each other.

"Hey Ted," she says back and smiles at me shyly. Her smile is really cute. Her eyes look directly into mine and I can find some nervousness to her. It may be a little soon to jump right into thinking about another girl the day after Marie, the girl I took out to dinner twice that I was really excited about, pulled the plug on me, but I always have this paranoia that if I don't act right away with a girl that some moron guy with God-given activeness will scoop her up. So I make a deal with myself that the next time I see Alyssa I will attempt to strike up a conversation with her to see if I really like her.

As I open the door to the building my class is in, I hold the door and turn around to see if anyone is behind me. I know I hate it when I have to catch a door that someone in front of me didn't take an extra half-second to pass to me. I look and see a girl coming up the stairs to the building, but she's about a minute away from the door. She wears a pink knitted hat over her waist-long shimmering straight brown hair. She has on a black fleece instead of a jacket, and I can only imagine how cold she must be so underdressed. She looks up at me, tilting her pink nose and pigmented cheeks in my direction, and sees that I'm waiting for her with the door open. She smiles and starts jogging up the steps. She really doesn't have to rush to appease me. If I was really in such a hurry that she would need to jog, I wouldn't have held the door.

"Sorry, thank you," she says. She's ready to take the door from me, but I hold onto it and gesture for her go ahead.

"Oh thanks," she says as she walks into the building.

"No problem," I say. And I know I will probably never run into her again. I'll never learn her name. We won't say hello even if we do see each other again. This was just a one-time encounter between the two of us.

I get to class a tiny bit early and I sit down. I'm not a fan of the people in my class. They all usually just write about their weekends which consist of how trashed they all got. I like getting drunk with

my friends as much as the next guy, but I don't come to class showboating about it. I also don't do it each and every weekend. I have other things going on in my life.

I tune into a conversation that a pair of girls are having about a guy one of them had apparently dumped during the weekend. This girl is very large and very hungry from the looks of her bologna, ham, cheese and mayonnaise sandwich, her Mr. Goodbar, her M&Ms pie, and her pair of Mountain Dews. In contrast, her friend is absurdly skinny and is orange with dyed black hair and has too much eye shadow on.

"Okay, this kid," the girl says referring to the guy she dumped. (I don't know when "this kid" became an expression for guys among women. I hear it all the time.) "He was like holding doors and like pulling out chairs for me and fucking complimenting me and shit like what the fuck? I can't even deal with it when a guy's being nice. Like I just can't even deal with it."

"Yeah, I know," the orange girl adds.

"Like it's like, what is he up to? You know?"

"Yeah."

"Like I just can't even deal with it. This kid's being way too nice. I'm like hold up," and they start laughing.

"The hell is this kid doing all this shit for me for?" She goes on with a mouthful of bologna. "And I felt his dick when he tried to kiss me. It wasn't that big. Like I'm getting tired of this shit. Where are all the good dicks?" And the girls laugh and laugh. And I can't help but picture Marie having the same conversation wherever her class is.

Lunchtime has nothing good to eat. I really only want cake or some kind of dessert, but all they have for sweets is stale cookies. I care more about getting something sweet than getting something of quality, so I put three of those bad boys onto a napkin. I continue to the sandwiches because they're usually a safe option. They're always disappointingly bland, but I'll at least eat them. My objective is to successfully put something in my stomach so I'm not hungry later.

"Hey Ted!" My roommate greets me cheerfully.

I spot him sitting with the rest of my friends. I sit down and across from me is a girl whom in the past I had kind of a thing for, but another guy asked her out before I got a chance to. She is seated

on his lap giggling at all the incredibly funny things he has to say. She used to have incredibly funny things of her own to say, but now she spends her time listening to what he has to say instead. They've been together for a year.

Next to me is a very attractive woman who gives me a big hug as a greeting. Her long hair is lush and soft and flows over me as she holds her body against me. Her head falls on my shoulder, filling my senses with the sweet smell of her hair, and I hear the sound of her giggling. The straps of her top bend outward down over her shoulders as her partially exposed breasts press up against my chest. She's my friend and her boyfriend is dumb as a brick. They've been together for two years.

Another female friend of mine named Zoe sits down diagonal from me. She greets me cheerfully and we make a few jokes. I tell a joke that makes her squint her eyes in hysterics gasping for breath cackling. Her boyfriend walks over and bluntly tells her how stupid her outfit looks. She giggles and tells him to shut up playfully and then they kiss. He fondles her bum during the kiss and she pulls away from him scowling.

"Whoa, what's your problem, babe? Is it that time of the month?" he chortles at her. She walks away without saying anything. He chases after her. They've been together three and a half years.

I see Alyssa and her friends sit at a nearby table. I'm acquainted with her friends. Two of them are single and tremendously overweight. I see them munching away at their mountains of food on their trays. Another one of Alyssa's friends is quite attractive and her boyfriend is quite the overeater himself. He also drinks until he's sick, burps heartily and finds it amusing and likes to think he's smarter than everyone else. They've been together for two months.

The last member of Alyssa's table is single, very pretty, and the rudest damn person I've ever had the displeasure of meeting. Her name is Charlotte and she's absolutely relentless with name-calling. It's as if it were the only way she knows how to communicate. She once asked me what time it was and then called me a fucking retard in a really nasty tone of voice when I took too long to read the analog clock. But everyone excuses her behavior because they all say, "She's just joking, don't be so sensitive." And so she has permission to continue her aggressive angry behavior.

But I digress. I made a deal with myself that I would talk to Alyssa the next chance I got. But she's sitting so far away from me. I hate it that something like physical positioning has such an impact on social situations. Just because I happened to sit where I am, my position now complicates my ability to meet new women. I guess I just have to walk over to their table and talk to Alyssa. But Charlotte is sitting with her. I can't possibly have a decent conversation with Alyssa without Charlotte interrupting us with rude comments about me. So I decide that now is not a good time because Charlotte is here. I make an amended deal with myself that I will talk to Alyssa the next chance I get when Charlotte isn't there.

Later in the day I'm in my room twiddling on my guitar again. My computer is open and I have Facebook up. Marie is online in the Facebook chat. I pray she doesn't try to talk to me in pursuit of a pointless friendship with me. I hate the Facebook chat. Sometimes I like to just leave people a message and have them get back to me later. But if they see me online they'll want to chat. Also, when I post a Facebook status, a lot of times my attractive female friends immediately think it's an invitation for them to start a chat with me and really I just want to post it and look at the comments later. I don't even bother writing on people's walls anymore because they get posted into the main feed so anyone can just jump into the conversation.

I try my hand at finger picking for a while. My fingers knock into the wrong strings here and there and I get loud obnoxious wrong off-tempo notes. I'm not supposed to look where my fingers pick because I'm trying to improve my aim. If I hit enough obnoxious wrong strings, eventually I won't hit them so much anymore. It's just a really annoying little exercise. It's like listening to a song you really like, but some guy in the band keeps hitting a giant gong randomly in the background and it's so distracting that you can't enjoy the song anymore.

I see that Alyssa is online in the Facebook chat thing. I have an opportunity before me to talk to her. I've never had a real conversation with her before and I think it'd be a little odd to have my first conversation with her be over the Internet. Women always seem to be on alert to determine whether or not a guy is a creep. So she could possibly not react very well if I decided to randomly try to talk to her over Facebook, even if we do see each other all the time.

It's not like I'm a stranger to her. I've exchanged a couple of words with her from time to time when we're in a group. Plus I did make an amended deal with myself.

Against my better judgment I type: "Hey, how you doing?" The exact same phrase I said to her earlier today. I'm pleasantly surprised to see her respond to me. I figure it's the modern age: people talk on the Internet all the time. I start cracking jokes and her posts all start with "lol" and "lmfao." I can't necessarily assume that she's actually "laughing out loud" or "laughing [her] fucking ass off," but I think at the very least she's enjoying talking to me and thinks I'm funny. And as we chat for a while I realize how it feels so much easier than talking in person because I can look over what I'm about to say, proofread it, estimate how the person will react, then submit it. I can even finger pick a little tune on my guitar in between posts. However, it troubles me a little how the whole spontaneity of conversation is lost because I know that everything she says to me could be carefully calculated and edited before I see it. She could possibly call friends over to look at what she's about to say and they could potentially coach her on what to type. She could even have a friend take over for a while. I could be talking to Charlotte for all I know.

The conversation runs dry and I find myself running out of things to say. I've already asked the usual questions: "What classes are you taking?" "What's your major?" "Where are you from?" Things like that. So now I am debating if it is socially acceptable to ask a girl out on a date over the Internet. I mean there are dating websites where people must ask each other out online. There are plenty of grown people out there looking for dates on the Internet. Though these thoughts don't creep me out any less.

Finally I just decide: what the hell, I'm doing it. I'm never going to pull her away from Charlotte and her friends anyway. I might as well just ask her while it's still just the two of us talking alone. So I type in: "Would you like to have dinner with me?" But I don't send it because I realize how this can be interpreted. I know I don't want to use the word "date" because I think it sounds stupid to flat out say that it's a date. But to just say "having dinner" could mean just dinner in the cafeteria. So I revise it to: "Would you like to go out to dinner with me?" Which doesn't sound too bad, but it's just four words more than "Would you go out with me?" which sounds just a

little desperate. So I change it to: "Can I take you out to dinner?" I squint my eyes a little bit because it still sounds dumb to me. I suppose it sounds acceptable, but I'm not thrilled about it. I just can't think of any other way to say it.

I send the message. And of course she takes several agonizing moments to respond. I picture her staring at the screen gasping, "What in God's name was he thinking asking me out over the Internet? What a fucking retard!" I stare into the strings and play a cheesy rendition of the snake charmer to amuse myself so I will feel less nervous. My fingers shake a little.

"Lmfao sure what did you have in mind?" she writes back. And now comes the next test: will she care if I have a car or not? Some girls will not even bother with a guy if he has no means of transporting them. Some girls believe when you take them out you literally take them out. You scoop them out of their house (or dorm in this case), you transport them, you pay, you bring them back; you do everything, they do nothing, and that's how it should be.

And it just doesn't seem fair to me. It's not like most guys my age in college have enough money to support car payments. And we don't all have the luxury of rich parents to buy us cool cars. And even if a guy does have rich parents, what if he's from out of state and is a plane ride away from home? Do they really expect these guys to own their own cars? But I guess if you're a guy spoiled by rich parents, the world is your piggy bank. They'll buy you a fancy car and girls will like you and you won't even have to stress over whether or not it's socially acceptable to ask a girl out over the Internet. You've got a nice car so you'll be all right. You can afford to make whatever you want to be socially acceptable.

I suggest to her that we take the train into the city where we would eat at kind of a fun restaurant where you cook your own food in a pot in front of you. I've been to this place with my friends before and it was quite a good time. A few painful moments later, she replies that she's never been to a place like this before and would like to go. And after we agree on a time for the weekend I immediately find an excuse to log off. Whatever else I have to say I want to save it for the date. I need to be able to have things to say because there is nothing a woman hates more than a quiet-ass date.

It's the afternoon of the date. Two hours before we're supposed to meet in fact. I'm sitting in my room with my guitar on my thigh.

My chest is throbbing. I dread every moment that brings me closer to when I have to meet up with her. I go through in my head how I am completely prepared to go on this date. I have showered and shampooed thoroughly. I even used conditioner that is separate from the shampoo because it supposedly does a better job on my hair than if I used a two-in-one. I put product in my hair so that it looks nice. I moisturized my skin. I have deodorant on that one of my attractive female friends told me smells nice on a day she was kind of violating my personal space a bit. I also have a touch of cologne that one of my female friends gave to me and assures me smells nice. I wear a black button-down shirt and dark wash jeans, all of which female friends helped me pick out and promised me look attractive on me. So I know I'm doing everything right.

I practice bar chords. The "bar" in a bar chord refers to my index finger holding all six strings down on the same fret. My middle, ring finger and pinky make the chord shapes. My index finger is not terribly attuned to holding down all the strings, particularly the highest two strings. So I end up with a strangled twangy noise each time I strum from my index finger muting the strings. And what's worse is a lot of chord shapes require that I hold down three strings with just my ring finger. It is one nasty contortion of the human hand to try to make those chords. I have to take a lot of breaks because my hand seizes up. I have to force myself to play them so that I can build the muscle in my hand. It'll all pay off in the end if I keep forcing myself to try.

I'm waiting at the bus stop where we're supposed to meet. I hate it that I'm here before Alyssa. It's the waiting that kills me. I constantly check myself to make sure I'm acceptable-looking. I'm wearing a jacket that my beautiful female friend who hugs me a lot helped me pick out. I find myself sucking my stomach in subconsciously. And when I see Alyssa walking toward the bus stop, the very sight of her stings my chest with searing painful anxiety. Even though it was only a short while ago that I was picking at her physical appearance and judging her choice of friends and calculating whether or not I should bother going for her, now that I've asked her to come out with me tonight and she's agreed to it, my whole world becomes about making myself good enough for her.

"Hey, how you doing?" Third time I've greeted her this way. It's become automatic now.

"Hey Ted, I'm good," she says. I don't find any flaws in her physical appearance anymore. Her hair simply looks lovely. I've completely tossed my length specifications out the window. Her green shirt and light jeans cling to the curves of her body and make her seem very soft to the touch. She wears a denim jacket with excessive amounts of zippers. I debate with myself if I should tell her if she looks cute or beautiful or decide it's too soon to say any kind of compliment at all and spare myself the risk of looking like an idiot. I decide for now it's best I just stay casual and keep my affectionate remarks to myself.

I perform pretty well at making conversation on the bus and the train, which are always where I'm most concerned about finding things to say. It is an atmosphere where there is nothing to talk about. Everything must come from you. Everything you say, every thought you have, it's all from your own brain. And since we were already messaging each other last night, there are fewer questions for me to ask about her. I search for funny stories I like to tell people and old jokes that I make a lot that usually get laughs. It's like a stand-up comedy routine. I have a new audience to go through my repertoire with. But I don't want to be a self-absorbed jerk, so I try to ask questions that would trigger her to share a few stories of her own. But it's difficult because she constantly shifts the conversation back on me.

"What do you and your hometown friends usually do?" I mentioned a little bit about my hometown friends a moment ago.

"Oh, you know, we go out to eat and see movies and stuff," she says dryly. "What do you do with your friends?"

It's fine for now. Maybe she'll be more open after she's more comfortable around me. It just takes time, I suppose. For now she seems perfectly happy to listen to my stories. I enjoy seeing her laugh with that pretty smile of hers.

The restaurant is this Japanese-themed place called Shabu Zen in which each table has a pot with broth boiling on a hot plate and what you order off the menu determines the raw ingredients they bring you so that you may cook your own food.

They start us with a big bowl of salad with serving tongs and two little bowls for ourselves. Before Alyssa can serve herself I immediately ask for her bowl. She obliges smiling big and pretty. I start putting the salad into her bowl.

"Wow, I'm just..." she gets all flustered. "I'm so not used to this." "Really?" I reply adding surprise to my voice.

The waiter arrives with our trays of raw meat and vegetables. I elegantly lift the meat with my chopsticks and slide it into the broth. I've always been good with chopsticks. I wish I were as good at guitar as I am with chopsticks. I look and see Alyssa struggling with her chopsticks.

"You do have a fork you know," I tell her. "It's rolled up in the napkin if you want to use it instead."

"I know," she says. "But I mean aren't I supposed to use chopsticks?"

"You can use your fork if you need to. I'll look the other way if it'll help. If anyone asks I'll say you were an absolute surgeon with those chopsticks. Whatever it takes; I don't want you to be hungry."

She laughs all along as I prattle on to her. She finally surrenders and takes a fork to her food. When it's time to fish our food out of the pot, I get to tease her a little bumping my chopsticks into her fork, hassling her as she gets her food. I'm quite good at making her laugh.

I pay for the meal. She fought me on splitting the bill for a while, but I won eventually. I guess a lot of women have this concern that if the guy pays then he expects her to put out, which little do they know is not the case with me. I'm perfectly capable of being generous for the sake of being generous. But of course I am being generous because I hope she will want to continue seeing me, but nothing beyond that for now.

When we return to campus, she shivers as we get off the bus. Her little jacket with the zippers is not nearly warm enough. Without a word, I slide my jacket off and put it over her shoulders. I worry that she'll try to be polite and tell me I don't have to. But to my delight she chooses to just accept it and smiles. I take her hand and lace my fingers with hers. I ask her if she'd like to go out again this weekend and she says she would love to in an affectionate tone. We arrange the time as I warm her icy hand.

We come to the entrance of her dorm and I move my hand from her hand to her waist. I tilt my head forward and touch the side of her face with my fingertips. I watch her eyes widen and glisten with the dim light before they start to close just as mine do. And I put my lips to hers, taking in how they feel against mine, listening to

the sound of our breaths and indulging in the softness of her face and her slender body.

"Goodnight," I say and I move away from her. My hands drift off of her. Her eyes take longer to open than mine do. And her eyes don't leave my sight for another moment of gazing back at me. And when we accept that the night is over she smiles once again, which makes me smile back at her. I turn my head and walk away without looking back. My chest does not stop throbbing.

In my room I sit at my computer trying out different chord progressions and challenging myself to try different more rapid-moving strumming patterns. I wish Alyssa would appear online so I could talk to her some more. I know I shouldn't get my hopes up too high, but it feels so good when I do. But I tell myself it will only make it hurt more should I get disappointed again. But I don't really like to be a killjoy on myself.

Alyssa does not appear online, but it is my friend Zoe who starts a chat with me. She is terribly stressed out with her classes and her job, and a whole mess of people have been real jerks to her. And I give her my words of sympathy. I generally don't have a very stressful workload and people don't treat me too poorly (other than Charlotte, but whenever I complain about her to anyone I'm being too sensitive), so I feel bad that Zoe has to have so much stress in her life.

"So this bitch at work," she types, "told me that I should just quit because I completely bullshit my way out of everything and I apparently can't adequately do anything anyone tells me to do and that I never pull my own weight."

"She's just being powerful," I tell her. "She's trying to just shut you down so she can feel more important than you because she feels threatened by you."

"You know what else is her boyfriend comes by the store a lot and she does not want me talking to him ever like I'm gonna try to steal him from her."

"See, yeah. She's totally threatened by you. It's all bullshit. I hope you're not taking anything she says to heart."

"I keep telling myself that it's bullshit, but some part of me wants to believe her because whenever I do make a mistake I immediately catch myself on it and think oh god what if she's right."

"You can't do that to yourself. Don't obsess over it. The fact that you can catch yourself when you do make a mistake is reason enough that you are doing a good job."

I spend a lot of my evening comforting her. And I can't help but think why is it me, not her boyfriend of three years, that she comes to for comfort? Because a boyfriend, I would think, would be someone you would want that kind of support from. But I mean, all I'll have to do is look at her boyfriend and I'll know right away why she doesn't go to him for moral support. All he'll do is make a snide disrespectful remark about how she needs to stop PMS-ing, which brings me back to the wonder of why she stays with him in the first place. But good thing she's got me, right? She can tell me all about her problems and I'll be there for her. And once she's gotten it all off her chest she can go make love to her boyfriend in peace.

But what do I care? I had an absolutely amazing time tonight and I have tomorrow night to look forward to. I set my guitar aside and climb into bed. Maybe I'm just feeling happy and excited, but my bed feels especially comfortable tonight. I close my eyes and fantasize about what the following night will be like. I imagine kissing Alyssa again, perhaps in the city under snowy trees with Christmas lights twinkling in their branches and the glow meeting the fluttering snowflakes as they sparkle on Alyssa's tender face.

I get myself dressed for my date with Alyssa tonight. I've got a nice-looking polo shirt with dark wash jeans. I feel like my hair looks even better than it did the night before. I smell awesome. And as I put on my belt I hear a knock on my door. I open the door and I'm kind of taken aback because it's Alyssa.

"Hey, what's up?" I smile. I actually greet her differently for once.

"Hey," she says. She looks drained. It is kind of a long walk from her dorm to here. An uphill walk as well.

"Well, come on in." I usher her into the room. She smirks and chuckles a little. I notice she's holding my jacket from last night.

"Oh, my jacket, I completely forgot," I chuckle. "Thanks for bringing it."

"Oh, no problem," she says.

"Hey, you know if you're really cold walking around, I have other jackets so you can hold onto that one if you want. It's really no problem."



"No, it's fine. You can have it back."

"Alright, if you're sure." I take the jacket from her. I probably should not have suggested she keep it. Also I'm realizing the way I said it was dumb. Too many words.

"There's something I want to talk to you about," she says.

"Oh, okay, what's going on?" The first thud of dread hits the pit of my stomach. I think to myself, here it comes.

"I've had a great time getting to know you and I really like you a lot, but"—the second thud hits—"there are things about myself that I still need to figure out, so I don't think I'm quite ready to have a relationship just yet."

"Okay," I say. It's the only answer there is.

"I'm sorry," she goes on. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I say.

"You're a really nice guy and I'd like to still be friends. I don't know what else to say."

"You don't need to say anything else," I tell her. She looks at me with wide lovely eyes. Her lips wobble and quiver.

"Well, I'll see you around," I say and gesture for the door.

Apparently I need to cue her that she's successfully dumped me.

"Yeah, okay, see you." She leaves and I promptly close the door behind her.

I sit down and open my guitar case. It's getting colder, so I should probably put in the humidifier soon. I like my guitar to have a rich sound, even if my only reward for the care I put into it is a mess of funky muted-note sounds and unpleasant twangs. I play a few simple chords to warm up. I can't get into it if I don't try to enjoy it at first. And then I try to finger pick and scrape out a few bar chords to a song I like. I sing quietly to myself over the twangs. I lose my rhythm in the words of the song a few times, but it doesn't stop me. If I just keep making myself pick it up every day, it will one day become something truly beautiful.

Listen

By Caitlin Collins

I'm proud to be the person I am,
Proud that I have the power to affect—
And help others respect that we all come with our own defect,
That in fact those flaws that keep us from being perfect
Are what enable us to reject and connect to the person we truly are.

I'm proud that I have a voice,
For the words that I speak and the mistakes that I can teach
Can influence others not to use my past technique.

I'm proud that I have been mute;
Now I know, whether you listen or not, in my heart
I will always have things to feel proud of, as we all do.

I'm proud that I have been weak,
Deranged and incomplete—so to speak—
But more proud that I can now critique the past for what it was.

I'm proud that I cannot be defined by mankind,
By a single label or sign—

I'm proud that I was once blind,
For now I see the world with an open mind.

I'm proud that I was once deaf,
For now I take the time to hear what others have to say.

I'm proud that I have failed,
For now success feels important in the essence
Of being able to learn from my mistakes.

I'm proud to have the ground underneath my feet,
To be able to stay strong when I'm not concrete.

So now I ask, what are you proud of?
Or are you just another victim of society's constant ways,
Unable to confide your success to others
Because it's easily mistaken for boastful pride.

We keep our achievements under a top hat,

Got the routine down pat—
For if you share what you shine at,
You're an easy target for being the prey they can peck at;
Can't the world just open its ears and appreciate our words' way?
Will it really take up that much time in a day?

Pay attention to what others have to say.
Don't think of it as a task to obey, but rather
A blessing—and knowledge to be gained.



Jenn Barbo, "Industry of Nature" Marker Drawing



Ali Angerman, "Goldfish" Digital Print

Tripping the Nerd

By Corey J. Theodore

When I was in elementary school, more specifically fourth grade, I was not particularly liked by my classmates. I had just moved to my school from a neighboring town and was considered the oddball in many situations. My time there was essentially one enormous attempt at avoiding embarrassment. I was the quiet type then, as opposed to the mean, vicious, and aggressive children that I was surrounded by. Even very early in my time with them, I knew I did not want to be thought ill of. When they did not consider you to be one of their own, you were tortured socially, and in rare cases, pain was inflicted upon you in physically devastating ways.

One of my classmates was in a position similar to mine, in that he was not mean and vile like the rest and was considered by the others to be quite nerdy. When you looked at him, it was difficult to avoid feelings of pity and sympathy. He came from a poor family, one of at least seven children, and it was obvious that the clothes he wore upon his back had long since gone through their glory days. My other classmates had grown fond of tormenting him by throwing sand at him, shoving him to the ground, and throwing his books off his desk at inconvenient times.

At the moment I bring attention to now, the class was outside watching a science experiment after a day of heavy rain. We were all sitting on the ground outside, with me in the very first row, in plain view of the other forty or so students behind me. I was never particularly prone to inflict embarrassment upon another human being, and there was nothing about this particular moment that triggered me to do so.

While the rest of the class was still sitting, James the nerd stood up, approached the teacher to ask her permission to use the rest room, and proceeded to walk in front of my row, bobbing along quickly to avoid the embarrassment of being in front of everyone for a long period of time. It was at this point that a spontaneous thought emerged in my head: I'm going to trip him. I knew that if I did, I would undoubtedly be accepted by the rest of the class. I finally had an in. However, I didn't know if I could put such a pitiful kid through the torment of being embarrassed in front of a large number of peers.

He was walking closer and closer to me, and I knew I had to make a decision. I could feel the eyes of everyone behind me as they followed the movements of this poor child. They were all craving entertainment, their lips pressed together in anticipation of anything interesting. He was almost in front of me, his pace quickening. As if I had super speed, I extended my leg just as his foot passed in front of me. He was nowhere near prepared for it, and his foot took the full extent of the blow, forcing his upper body to shoot forward. There was an instantaneous gasp from the crowd behind me, the hopes of every student about to be fulfilled. James put up a valiant effort, trying desperately to get his feet comfortably back under his body where they were supposed to be. The fall was inevitable at this point. James' shoulders lurched forward and his hands outstretched to brace the blow, though it was no use. His head met the soft muddy ground that follows a large rainstorm, and his fingers were engulfed by the earth.

The class stood still, and time seemed to follow. We all held our breath, waiting for anyone to break the silence. James began to rise, the mud and dirt slipping down his nose. He wiped his eyes, blinked a few times, and glared in my direction.

My classmates often remarked of that day, and I was instantly accepted as one of them. James, however, was the only one who understood the true reasons behind my pusillanimous act.

The Shadow Boy

By Christopher Wilson

It was a seemingly ordinary day as Rachel took the bus to school. In the six months since her family moved to Manhattan, it could have been possible for her to find her place amongst her peers. However, her shy demeanor had led her to the status of wallflower. Her appearance didn't help much either. Her short brown hair never shimmered, her face was not strikingly beautiful, and her body almost made her androgynous. Her parents didn't earn enough to purchase fancy outfits, so she had to settle for simple skirts and blouses from Old Navy. But as she prepared to undergo the day-to-day grind, she never knew that today she would meet someone who would be able to appreciate her.

As she entered the building, she noticed a crowd at one side of the hall. After pushing through, she saw in the middle a boy with spiky black hair wearing a green jacket and tan shorts. She recognized him as Gerald, the school gossip. Although she always had doubts whether or not his seemingly endless collection of urban legends was true, she decided to see what he came up with this time.

"Hear me now, ladies and gentlemen," he proclaimed in his usual dramatic tone, "for the tale I am to tell is one that has been passed down for over twenty years. It is the tale of the super-punk that was once feared throughout our own neighborhood. His fighting was so fierce he was even able to take on thugs several grades above him. Every gang wanted him, yet none was able to convince him to join. They continued to try, each failed attempt making them more and more desperate. It all erupted one fateful night, when he stormed into the hangout of the most persistent gang of all, tired of their pleading, bribes, and offers. In one bloody beat down, he sent the entire gang to their graves, only to follow them soon afterward from exhaustion."

"Now that was a punk," one of the crowd members commented.

"Yes," Gerald replied, "but, that's not the kicker. It has been said that the punk's ghost now haunts the place where he died." Most of the crowd began murmuring to each other at this point. "His rage has brought terror to any who intrude upon his resting place. The

few that have survived describe him as a large formless shadow. Because of this, he now exists under the name of Shadow Boy."

The crowd was now worried and amazed over the story. Rachel stayed quiet as always, but she was impressed with the impact Gerald had on everyone. In truth, she had always admired the way he spun words and recounted the supposed past. She felt that with his talent in the spoken arts, he could become one of Hollywood's greatest talents.

"What baloney!" The shriek of a snobbish voice drew the crowd's attention. The criticism came from Amanda, the richest girl in school. With her fabulous body, flowing brown hair, and her taste for the latest fashions, the only thing keeping her from a modeling career was her parents' decision for her to have a normal education. Unfortunately, this did nothing for her upstart demeanor.

"You would actually call the Shadow Boy baloney?" Gerald exclaimed back at her. "If he heard what you said, you'd be axed."

"As if I'm still a kid able to believe in ghost stories," Amanda countered. "We're all old enough to realize there are no such things."

"More like you're too narcissistic to lower yourself into admitting that you might be wrong."

"How flattering of you to say that about me. But really, your ridiculous stories can only get you so far. When you finally run out, everyone will learn the truth. The truth that you're just a spotlight addict with a knack for making things up."

"Take that back!" Everyone was shocked about Rachel talking back to Amanda, even Rachel. Gerald may have even been touched by it.

"Well, well," Amanda amusingly retorted, "never expected Little Miss Shy to have a backbone. You must have a thing for strong speakers." Rachel turned slightly red at that accusation. "Still, I don't blame you. After all, he can communicate in a way you're too scared to do. If your looks were more like mine, maybe people would actually want to talk to you."

"Hold it," Gerald interrupted. "This debate is between you and me, so leave her out of this."

"Defending your favorite admirer, eh?" Amanda snapped with a snicker.

"Tell you what," Gerald proposed, "what if I went to the Shadow Boy's haunt and brought back video evidence? Would that convince you?"

"Maybe. Where exactly did he die?"

"In the old abandoned subway station five blocks south of here."

"And what are the odds that you'll just get some computer geek to make a fake video for you?"

"That won't happen, because I'll be taking Rachel as a witness." This development stunned Rachel. However, if it meant having the chance to see Amanda being shown up, then it was worth the risk. "I'll do it," she replied.

"Great," Gerald said with satisfaction. "Then we'll head over there tonight. That gives us our best chance of seeing him."

"Or earn yourselves two pairs of bags under your eyes," Amanda countered.

"Just you wait," Gerald snapped.

The sky was dark and cloudy that night, as the two arrived at the deserted station. Rachel stood by Gerald, video camera in hand. He stood confident armed with a flashlight.

"You ready?" he asked. Rachel gave a small nod, still a little nervous about the situation. "All right then. Let's go."

The pair approached the boarded up entrance and as Rachel recorded, Gerald lifted one of the boards aside. The opening was tight, but they were both able to squeeze through. Slowly, they stepped down the dark, trash covered stairs. Their footsteps echoed as they reached the bottom. The ticket booth that awaited them was outdated, with manual turnstiles as opposed to the modern electronic gates. After climbing over the rusty contraptions, they stood in the eerie silence of the main station.

"When do you think the Shadow Boy will appear?" Rachel asked.

"Well, it's about 8 p.m. now," Gerald answered after checking his watch. "I say that things should be getting interesting in an hour or so."

For a while, they sat in the dark, with the only light coming from Gerald's flashlight. At first, Rachel worried over what might happen if the Shadow Boy appeared. As time passed, she began to ponder some details of their situation she hadn't taken time to go over before. If this ghost was supposed to be a large shadow, then

how could it appear as such with no light cast on it? Also, if the station was closed off, how was Gerald able to move that board aside so easily? She barely had time to wonder about it further when the sound of footsteps echoed around them.

"Wow, earlier than I thought." Gerald's words startled Rachel, for in her deep thought she had almost forgotten he was there. She stood ready with the camera, prepared to capture their evidence as film. The footsteps continued to echo and she began to wonder where their ghost would come from. Just then, the lights suddenly came on. Momentarily blinded, she covered her eyes so they could adjust. When they did, she was shocked by what she saw.

Standing before them was a group of twenty or so men dressed in jeans, combat boots, and muscle shirts. Several had tattoos on their muscular arms and most had guns tucked in their pants pockets. The largest one had a shaved head and a cigarette in his mouth. Rachel had to guess that he was the leader of this apparent street gang.

"So, this is tonight's girl?" the leader spoke in a gruff voice. "I thought I was goin' to enjoy someone more attractive."

"Hey, give me a break. I was going to trick my school's future model into coming, but after she tried to defend me it all got sour."

Rachel was flabbergasted at what Gerald had said. "What do you mean?"

"I hate to break this to you, but I happen to be the kid brother to the leader of the toughest gang in our district. Most of the legends I tell at school are to spook our classmates into staying far away from their hideouts."

"So, what Amanda said was true," she spoke with a wounded tone. "You just have a knack for lying."

"Not all the time. The Shadow Boy is an actual urban legend around here. However, we have confirmed it to be completely false."

"I see. But...that doesn't explain why you brought me here."

"It's like my brother said. You're going to be his little playmate tonight. And one more thing, he finds virgins to be more enjoyable."

Rachel was so shocked over the latest developments that the brother of the influential speaker was easily able to pin her down. She gazed in horror at the thug of a man, his body smelling foul from sweat, as he gave a psychotic smirk.

"You shouldn't worry too much," he giggled. "Maybe after I'm done, you may actually grow out more, if you know what I mean." At first, she tried to struggle her way out. But as she slowly gave up hope, she sadly closed her eyes and braced for the worst.

Suddenly, the sound of someone gagging reached her ears and the weight on top of her lifted. Rachel opened her eyes and gasped in surprise. The giant thug was floating several inches off the ground, his hands at his throat as if some invisible force was choking it. Meanwhile, his brother and gang members stared in disbelief. Then the oaf was flung onto the wall and fell unconscious on the floor.

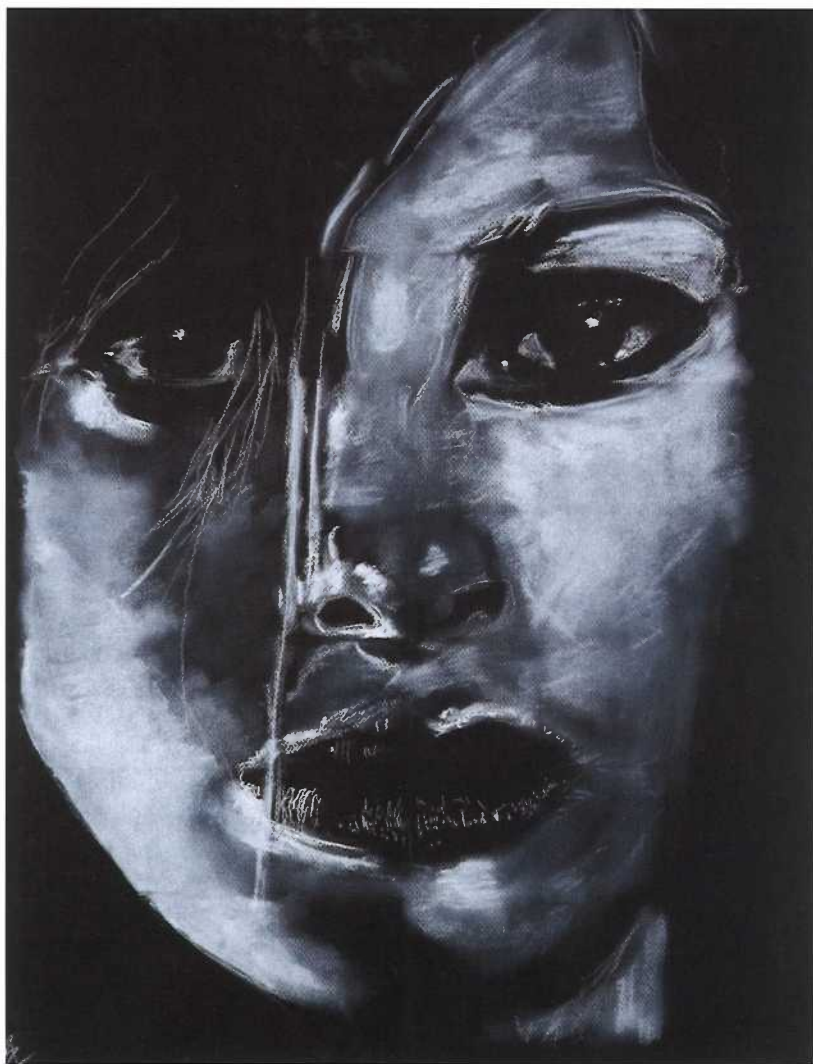
"It can't be!" Gerald spoke in a fearful voice. Then something black appeared on the floor before the gang. It rose up, taking the shape of a vaguely humanoid blob. "The Shadow Boy's real!"

At that moment, the whole gang drew their guns and shot fire on the legendary phantom. Gerald jumped out of the way, while Rachel stayed down on the floor for cover. But as much as they shot, their bullets just went through it. They kept it up until their ammo ran out, leaving them defenseless.

The Shadow Boy then raised one of its arms. A reddish-black sphere formed from what might have been its hand. Suddenly, the sphere erupted into several smaller spheres, which were flung at the gang members and Gerald. The spheres engulfed them, and as they pounded on the surface trying to break out, they slowly sank into the floor.

Rachel stared in amazement at what had happened. However, when the figure turned toward her, she became fearful again. Her sense of awe returned quickly, as the shadow's form grew more solid. Its shape became completely human and its black outline vanished. The once horrific figure had turned into a teenage boy wearing a red shirt under a black jacket with grey jeans and leather shoes. His short hair was silver with a large lock covering his right eye. Rachel lay as she was for a few seconds, unable to figure out how to act. Then the boy extended his hand, his face bearing a warm smile.

"Need some help?" he spoke in a friendly and boyish voice. Touched by the gesture, she nodded and gave him her hand. "I'm glad you're OK," he said after helping her up.



Jenn Barbo, "Shiva's Eyes" Conte Crayon Drawing

"Thanks," she replied. "By the way, are you really the Shadow Boy?"

"Yeah. Although, in life my name was Seth."

"Really? Mine's Rachel."

"That's a nice name."

Rachel was still amazed, now by how friendly this ghost of a punk was acting. Then she remembered what had happened to everyone else. "Right. Those things that swallowed those thugs. Where did they take them?"

"The Dark Pit," Seth answered, "a dimension that exists entirely for redemption. Those jerks won't be able to escape without enduring agony equal to the weight of their sins."

"Wow, you seem more like a vigilante than your legend pegs you to be."

"Stories can get very distorted depending on how they're recalled. The truth is I never wanted to join any of those gangs for the sake of my sister."

"You had a sister?"

"Yeah, and I didn't want any one of those drug-sucking, tobacco-blowing numbskulls becoming a bad influence for her. Almost all the fights I got into were purely out of self-defense."

"But, the night that you died, you charged in here when it was used by one of those gangs."

"Because they held my sister hostage so I would join. In the end, I was so guilty about murdering in front of her, I just couldn't move on. And so, I've been here ever since."

"And where did the part about you being a vengeful ghost come from?"

"It probably built up after I scared off another of those obnoxious gangs after they moved in here."

"I guess you really hate street gangs now since they're worse than they were back then."

"I guess so, but the reason I saved you was because you remind me of my sister." Rachel's cheeks turned pink at this comment. "You had better go home."

"Sure," Rachel said nervously, "but do you think that I could visit you once in a while? It must be lonely to be here alone all the time. I know what that's like."

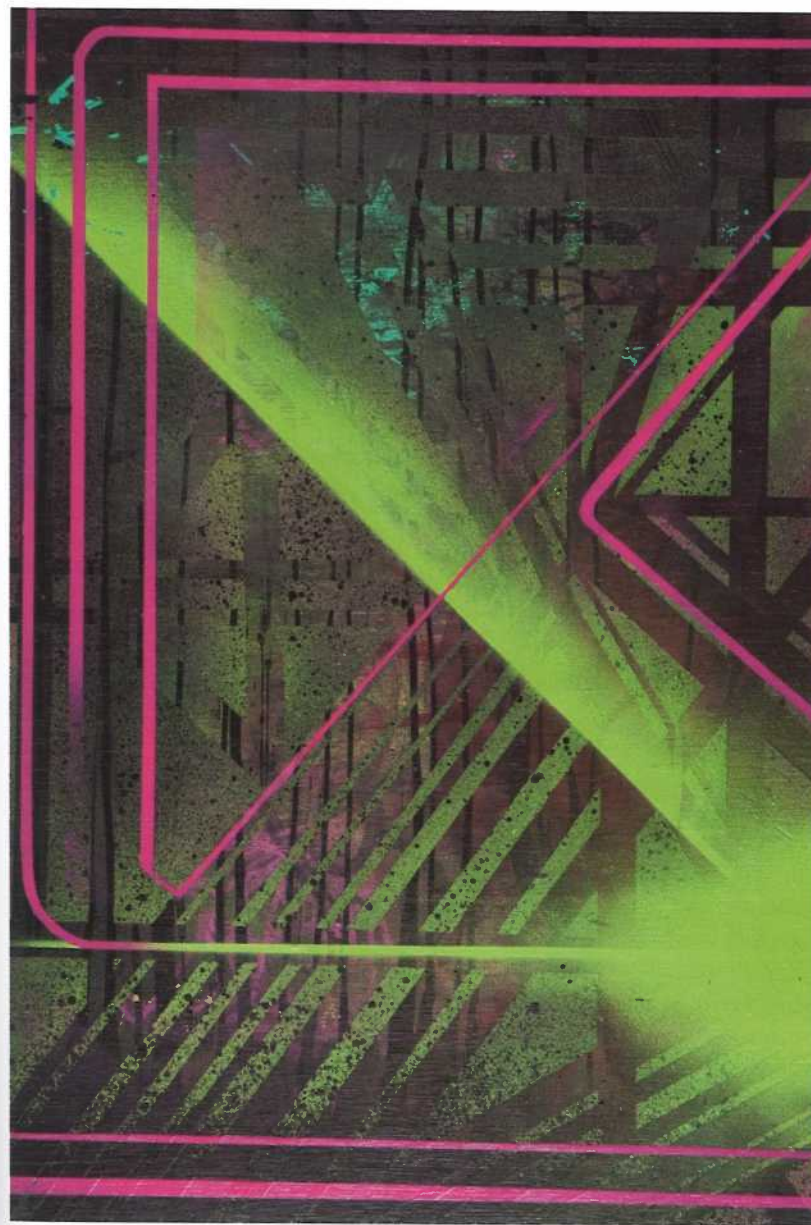
Seth was surprised by the offer for a moment, but his smile soon returned. "Of course."

The next day, Amanda was waiting at class for Rachel. "So, what happened to Gerald?" she asked with confidence.

"The Shadow Boy got him," Rachel bluntly replied.

"Oh, really? Well, why not you?"

"Because to jerks he's a monster, but to his friends he's a gentleman."



Christopher Swan, "Untitled" Spray Paint on Wood

Jameson York

By Sydney Kasierski

I miss your face, your smooth skin that was always hot like the sun,
 you were always like a space heater but without the plug. I
 remember
 when we used to cuddle under the covers and your feet kept
 mine warm,
 you hated how cold my feet always were, "bad circulation."
 Jameson, I miss your voice: you used to sing me to sleep almost
 every night,
 you'd whisper your lyrics into my ears, letting your heart be the
 drumbeat
 because my head was always laying on your chest—we fit like that.
 I miss our grocery shopping adventures, despite how damn
 annoying you were,
 you threw everything that even looked remotely good into our cart
 and made me look like the villain when I tossed it back on the shelf.
 Come on, sweetie, our little apartment wouldn't fit half the stuff you
 threw in.
 But I miss the way you'd push the cart while I stood balanced on the
 front bar...
 and the way we'd always dance to the radio playing in the store
 as we
 waited for our coffee to finish grinding, your favorite, caramel
 cinnamon swirl.
 I miss how you always tasted like it. I miss your soft lips on mine
 and the way
 your kiss would cure any pathetic fight we got into that day, your
 kiss always
 made my anger melt away. I miss our spot at midnight, the park
 down the road
 where we'd climb clumsily up the slide to the tower where we'd lay
 for hours
 watching the stars graze above us. Our hands would intertwine and
 we'd let the night
 melt away, counting fireflies that flew over our heads. I miss our
 midnight

margaritas and how fast you'd jump out of our bed when you heard
 the blender
 go off in the middle of the night. We'd blast Jimmy Buffet and the
 lime in
 the coconut and dance the best we could in our tiny little kitchen.
 I try to think
 of all of this, like you told me to, but then that day hangs over my
 head. The day we
 waited for three hours in the waiting room, the day the doctor came
 out with a
 solemn face, the day he said the cancer had spread and it was too
 late to do anything
 about it, the day you held me for hours while we both cried.
 I remember the beach
 late at night, though, when you gave me that ring, your
 grandmother's beautiful diamond
 ring: "I'm still yours, I'm still here, as long as it shines, love."
 I remember the day you left, the day you let the angels take you,
 the day
 I lost you. Jameson York, I want to thank you, because I should
 have done it more.
 I want to thank you for being the best part of my day, the best
 moment of my
 life, the person who taught me how to love. I want to thank you for
 playing with
 my hair and playing thumb wars with me every chance we got.
 I want to thank
 you for singing me to sleep, for counting the stars and kissing me
 softly. Jameson York, I
 want to thank you, for loving me.

- Always, me.



Taylor Larese, "Nemo" Glazed Stoneware

As Music Plays

By Brittany Capozzi

An etched scar sits on his obtuse chin
like a vein on an autumn leaf.
He taps his thumb on the downbeat
to the rough riddle of Dee McPhee:

*Crossroads full of pebbles weigh
my mind,
ice under train tracks scratch my soul,
gotta find a path
to walk myself back...*

The bass guitar curls its light fingers
into a tense fist with hunger.
Pounding. Pounding air.
Pounding. Pounding air.

Knocking his boot on the hardwood
floor,
he throws thunder under the boards.
ThudCreak. ThudCreak.
ThudCreak. ThudCreak.

What lives inside this moving figure?

Does he track odors of the past
through his old home, leaving
blueprints
of his future on the welcome mat?

*...I cannot move and still stand still,
oh no
I cannot whisper and shrill too,
gotta un-layer
gotta un-layer...*

Does he burn a book's pages in a
fire of ignorance or choose
to reuse its words
and survive its thoughts?

*I can't take fortune from unrolled dice,
can't give my milestones away,
...un-layer my mind
t' learn 'bout myself...*

When meeting the mirror each
morning
does he turn his cheek from the scar
or does he face imperfection?

*Knots surface on the bark of a tree,
rings within show grief, glee, and
growth,
...un-layer my mind
t' learn 'bout myself.*



Brittany Cocco, "Nefertiti" Glazed Stoneware

Mimi

By Nicholas Colicchio

The following is a series of short sketches involving my grandmother, Mimi. I assure you that these events are not fictional; even in my wildest dreams, I could not possibly have created them. My grandmother is unfathomably cheap, incurably clueless, and a drama queen. She also has vertigo, hearing impairment, and a false hip. The woman is my grandmother, and I do love her, but she can be hard to deal with at times. She thinks that she is a great grandmother, and as much as we try, she will never see the truth. In short, my grandmother is clueless, dealing with her is a nightmare, but at least I have entertaining stories to tell if I ever have children.

Underwear

Every year, for as long as I can remember, my grandmother has insisted on buying my family underwear. To me, underwear is a very personal article of clothing. There is a reason why stores do not accept returns on these articles. I feel that the only time a person should purchase underwear for another is if the person receiving the underwear is his or her spouse or child. Buying underwear for your grandchildren is creepy and downright wrong. Apparently, these thoughts have never crossed my grandmother's mind. Every Christmas, she hands us each a package. This package contains underwear that is not only the wrong style, but also the wrong size for any member of my family. About five years ago, my mother finally worked up the courage to ask my grandmother how she knew what sizes to purchase. She responded, "I just buy whatever is on sale."

Dinner Rolls

For a frail old woman, my grandmother eats a surprising amount of food. Based on the aftermath of a dinner, you would swear that she was a professional eater. I have no idea how she manages to eat so much and stay so thin, and I feel cheated out of her evidently amazing metabolism. Despite her lurking desire to consume all of the food in the known universe, she remains incredibly picky about what she eats. In all of my eighteen years, I do not recall a meal that my grandmother has enjoyed. She always

responds in the same manner, "To tell you the truth, I've had better." It doesn't matter where you take her; you can bring her to McDonalds or a gourmet restaurant, she has always had better. I do not know what this woman ate as a child, but based on her current attitude, I suspect that she subsisted off of nothing less than pure gold and prime rib.

My favorite food is pasta, specifically raviolis. My grandmother used to make the best raviolis in the world; that is until I learned her recipe. When I was a child, my favorite part of visiting my grandparents was the food. My grandmother would spend the whole day making a heaping pile of raviolis, a mountain of meatballs, and a river of homemade tomato sauce, what we call gravy. I used to get so excited on the ride to their house that I could barely sit still. All of that changed one summer day; I was about eight years old at the time. My grandmother had made the raviolis as planned, my family came to visit, and everything was going according to plan.

We sat down at the dinner table and my mother realized something. There were five dinner rolls and six people. It is a well-known fact that Italians love bread, and the bread to person ratio was way off. My mother decided that she would bite the bullet and not have a piece of bread. My brother and I decided to split a piece of bread, and the crisis was averted, or so we thought. We finished with the rolls and began to eat the pasta when we realized that there was still one roll left over. My brother and I decided that we were going to split this roll to make up for having half a roll each. My grandmother nearly gave us a heart attack as she yelled, "But, I was going to eat that!" The room went silent, and my mother stared blankly at the head of the table. My grandmother's face was as solid and unchanging as a stone; she was serious. We handed her the piece of bread and she proceeded to devour it. That is the last time I remember my grandmother cooking a meal for the family.

Ice Cream

My grandmother loves ice cream, but she loves money even more. It was tradition that during our yearly trip to Florida, we would walk to *Haagen-Dazs* and eat some delicious ice cream. She refused to buy hard ice cream because it was "too expensive." Instead, she would always walk two miles down the beach to get one-dollar soft serve. She openly criticized us for buying the good ice cream and refused to go with us unless we bought her cheap ice cream. We caved in once, and we never went back. This ice cream tasted like chalk mixed with cardboard, stale milk, cat food, and seventeen other unidentifiable flavors. It had the texture of peeling skin and paint chips, and it smelled like three-month-old yogurt. My grandmother smiled and handed the man a dollar. She didn't care if it tasted like rotten toe fungus: she liked it because it was cheap. My grandfather looked at her and said two words: "This sucks." He proceeded to throw the ice cream in the trash and he told us to follow him; he treated us all to *Haagen-Dazs* that night.



Michael Coleman, "Faith" Drawing on Wood

The Break

By Michael Grady

As I sit and sing a somber song
 Thunder booms and lightning cracks,
 Big Brother tells me again
 I am wrong.
 As we sit huddled, darkness to our backs,
 Fires of our society warming our hands,
 Do we shiver in revulsion and fear
 As flames lick and singe fingers,
 Pain the penalty, the power's reminder?

What is this dream you told me of?
 A dream of sleep within sleep,
 A dream of love?
 A lash of fire ahead and cold darkness behind,
 For you, the tears I weep.
 And for the world to see they freeze,
 Glacial, they rest on my cheek.



Amtul Saeed, "Endless Possibilities" Mixed Media Accordion Book



Family Portrait

By Justin Selig

Characters:

CAROL: 36 years old, mother of Billy and Tina and wife to Jack. Carol is a stay at home mom and is mentally bent out of shape after raising her kids alone for years while Jack was at war. She now resorts to drugs for peace.

JACK: 37 years old, father to Billy and Tina and husband to Carol. Jack is mentally distressed from the war and suffers from PTSD. He is struggling to support his family and keep himself together.

BILLY: 16 years old, son to Carol and Jack and brother to Tina. Billy is a football player and is a closeted homosexual trying to figure out his place in the world.

TINA: 16 years old, daughter to Carol and Jack and sister to Billy. Tina is heavily involved with school activities and is very involved with boys and exploring her sexual side to the utmost extreme. Tina would love to get her parents' attention for once.

Setting:

A house in a Pennsylvanian suburb in 1948.

(The lights go up on a quaint 50's dining room with a table and four chairs around it and a lovely display of flowers on top. In comes a gorgeous woman in her mid-thirties; she comes in humming and lightly dancing while dusting everything in sight.)

CAROL

"Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream, make him the cutest that I've ever seen" bum bum bum....

(Starts whistling, after a few seconds the phone rings, she runs over to grab it.)

CAROL

Hello, Anderson residence, this is Carol....Oh, Jack, it's you; today has been dreadfully boring....Oh, work's doing good? That's just swell; you gonna bring home the bacon and one of those nice and shiny Chevrolets?....Oh stop it, you're just too much...mmm....I see....Oh, no....That just won't do; the photographer is coming over this afternoon to take the family portrait and as the patriarch of this family you simply can't be late....Well, Billy is coming home straight after football practice and Tina has that student government meeting thing....They are going to be home soon, unlike a devastatingly handsome man that I know of....No, you stop it....Okay, well, do not be any later than three....Okay...love you too, Mr. Anderson...buh bye.

(Carol hangs up the phone and with less pep in her step, strolls around the room, dusting with less enthusiasm and essentially bored. Carol then tosses the duster onto a chair and turns to face the audience, pulls out a cigarette and lights up, takes it in and then slowly blows it out.)

CAROL

I did not spend three years of my life raising soon-to-be teenagers by myself to be reduced back to Susie fucking homemaker. I love Jack, I really do; we spent many amazing years together, most of which raising two amazing kids, but when he left for the war...(evil little giggle) that's when.... I love Jack for going out and defending his family against the Japs and those damn dirty Nazis, but who is

left? *(Points to herself.)* Me, that's who?! The money making and the child rearing, let me tell you it wasn't a walk in the park. Just when the kids are truly growing up...bye bye, da da. It's a good thing he came home in one piece, unlike my friend's husbands. It's pretty hard to keep a marriage going with a husband with no face or dick! Jack came home fine, got some cash from the government and one of these cute little houses. But I changed when he was gone. I like working and keeping myself busy, selling make-up door to door, and being a....*(looks at a cigarette)* botanist of sorts. If you haven't figured it out already, this is weed I'm smoking. I have a bunch of it growing out back next to the tomatoes and in between the zucchini....No one notices. Marijuana is very lucrative as far as cash goes, and it mellows me out....DONT YOU JUDGE ME! It's better than what my friends do, guzzling down whiskey and high balls as if it were water and just piling on the calories. So what if I'm...different? There is always at least one nut in a family; I'll give you one guess who it is.

(Billy comes rushing in, carrying a football and some cleats; he bumps into the table.)

CAROL

Careful now.

(Billy goes right past her and off stage to put his shoes down.)

CAROL

What? No hug or kiss for your mother? Where have kid's manners gone these days?

BILLY

Sorry, Mom.

(Goes over and kisses her on the cheek and then goes about playing and tossing his ball up in the air.)

CAROL

There will be no playing ball in this house, young man; tell me you did not track dirt in here with those muddy shoes of yours. They should start making football fields with fake grass and no mud.

BILLY

What would be the fun in that? It's just what guys do, rough around and get dirty; you should be lucky I didn't wear the shoes in the house.

CAROL

(Very much crazed and serious.) If you wore those shoes in this house, it would be the last thing you did.

BILLY

Okay...sorry.

CAROL

Oh, don't mind me; Mommy is just a little wound up, that's all.

BILLY

I'll help you clean.

CAROL

Don't you worry, I'll have this all picked up in no time. *(beat)* You need someone to take care of you. That's what I'm...here for.

BILLY

Thanks, Mom.

(Carol goes and gets a broom sitting in the corner, and just as she begins sweeping, she goes into a freeze and Billy turns to face the audience.)

BILLY

I need—I mean...I want....It's always after football practice that I get really riled up. Running and rolling around in the mud and then hitting the showers with...Brad Summers.

(He then hunches over, faces back, and takes some breaths, then faces forward again.)

I'm not sure what came first, my love of high school boys or the fact that I'm extremely good at throwing a pig skin across long distances. Not a single solitary soul can know. I'm dead serious, I would be like killed or worse—unpopular. Sometimes, I'll go ride the bus

and I see the way they treat the colored folks; they make them sit at the back of the bus, they're not allowed into some places, and they have to eat at the colored counter. If people are like that with them, just imagine what would happen to me; I'd be eating in an ally and riding underneath the bus probably. I wonder if other guys are like me; I've seen Dave and Joe look at me more than once. I don't think anyone really suspects; I try and keep my eyes to myself, most of the time, and also I have a girlfriend. Folks think that Roberta and I are a swell couple, but honestly I'm only with her because she is flat-chested and has a little bit too much peach fuzz for her own good. She even lets me call her Rob from time to time. My family is like the epitome of perfection, and right in the center is me, the pride and joy of my dad's life. It's unbelievable that kamikaze planes and Hitler couldn't kill my dad, but this one thing might....

(Carol unfreezes. Tina strolls in through the door and notices Carol cleaning.)

TINA

So typical!

BILLY

Yes indeed, sis, it's typical that on a day to day basis you are always hideous. I'm glad you've come to terms with that.

TINA

Jerk! You always make such a mess and then leave mommy dearest to pick it up for you. Be responsible for once.

BILLY

I'm responsible. I'm captain of the football team, that's something that requires a lot of respon- whatever.

TINA

Ooooo, captain of the Neanderthals, captain of the guys who can make a pass but can't make a complete sentence; you are just soooo impressive.

BILLY

Better than being on the air head prom committee and the ten other clubs you're in. What do you even do other than stink up the place with your aerosol hair that could choke an elephant?

TINA

Better than smelling like a foot!

(Billy gets close to her and shoves the dirty football t-shirt he's wearing in her face.)

TINA

Get that thing away from me!

(They start to fist fight.)

CAROL

Quit it the both of you, before I send you to your rooms for the night! Billy, go change your clothes; the photographer should be here soon.

(Billy exits)

TINA

Hey Mom, guess what?

CAROL

What dear?

(Carol starts folding dishtowels, occupying herself and only half listening to what Tina is saying to her.)

TINA

Class elections were today, and guess who got elected class president?

CAROL

Who? Is it Susan Mayberry? She's just too cute and her mother makes delicious pies for our book club.

TINA

No, it's me. I got elected.

CAROL

That's nice, dear.

(Carol freezes and Tina faces the audience.)

TINA

UGH!! Thanks a lot, Mother! I can always count on you to say a nice word; it's an improvement from what you usually say, nothing! No one gives a shit, why would they? I'm just so practically perfect in every meaning of the word. I'm seeing this guy or more like... four guys. I know what you're thinking, that's totally not enough. It's not good enough that someone is good in school and is successful; you have to have the looks and be popular too. I'm dating, if you call it that, the captain of the basketball team. He's 6'3, blonde hair, legs for days, and a nice firm...—I can't believe that I ever worried about losing my virginity; that's history. I feel good when I'm with someone, and when I'm not constantly with someone it feels...wrong. I'm not going to stop; *(unsure)* it's not like anything bad has come out of all this. Except, there were these two guys, one of them a grease monkey with a leather jacket, cute hair—crappy car, well, he went on a date with me and when he saw me with my shirt off, he left me on the side of the road; I puked my brains out for like two weeks straight. As mother says, "A moment on the lips, forever on the hips." Well, not for me, Carol. Then there was this other guy; he's on the football team, Brad something; anyway, we got really drunk and we...started to do it, but I really didn't want to and said "no" and "stop", but he continued anyway; that's not...bad, is it? I just got so used to doing it that even though he was hurting me, I just laid there and took it. I guess if I can't get noticed for the good I do, well then...

(Carol unfreezes.)

CAROL

Go put your books down, and freshen up a bit.

(Tina touches her face, insecure and bewildered about the makeup she practically just put on five minutes ago.)

TINA

But I....Yes, Mother.

(Tina exits. Carol takes a moment to herself to look around and then turns to audience.)

CAROL

I...I think I'm going to take the kids...and leave him.

(Carol turns away and Jack enters.)

CAROL

Honey! How was work?

(Goes over and gives him a hug and a kiss.)

JACK

The factory is doing just great; business couldn't be better.

CAROL

So do you think you're a step closer to that promotion? Oh, that's got a nice sound to it: Jack Anderson, floor manager.

JACK

Oh, stop it, but that does sound pretty nice. You are just too much.

CAROL

No, you are too much. *(Goes in for another kiss.)* Oh, shoot! I have to get this place ready for the photographer.

JACK

Stop that, the house looks fine. Now that I'm here, go and worry about yourself. You do too much.

CAROL

I don't mind.

JACK

I do, now go.

CAROL

Oooo, forceful, I like it.

(Carol goes to exit and just before walking out the door she turns back and looks back and then freezes.)

JACK

This life is so perfect, yet....It's like when you drop a cup or vase on the ground and it breaks into a bunch of pieces; you then go and put them back together, but there's a sliver or little itty bitty shard that you missed. That's how I feel. My world was blown apart when I was over there fighting and someone went and glued me back together with pieces missing, leaving me with this lingering feeling in my heart. Sure, I have an amazing wife and great kids, but this life is just so bizarre and almost dull. When you go from the sound of machine gun fire and mines exploding, anything else will seem dull. I was in the factory the other day, Today's a Thursday, so it was probably a Monday when it happened. Anyway, someone was working at their station not far from where I stand, and he dropped an entire pan of large screws and bolts. The sound was... *(remembering and cringing)*—I crouched down to the ground and I cried and just lost it; they told me to take a week off. Carol thinks that I did an extra good job so that's why I got time off.... I'm not sure how much longer I can keep lying. This week I go to "work" down the street with my good friend Sam Adams. I feel like at any moment I'll just crack. I should be strong for them; I have to be strong for them. It lingers you know, the sound of each one of those screws hitting the ground, so hard and echoing, so loud it sounded just like wh-...like the.... I just pulled the trigger and—Ahhhhh.

(Carol unfreezes and then walks out. Tina and Billy reenter.)

TINA

Daddy, you're back. I didn't even hear you come in.

JACK

Well, here I am. How about a kiss for your Pops?

(Tina goes over and gives him a kiss on the cheek.)

JACK

(Towards Billy) Put her there, captain!

BILLY

Dad, stop it.

(Billy goes over to him and he gives him a big firm handshake.)

JACK
So how are the two best kids in the world?

BILLY
Just great.

TINA
Same. Well, except I made class president. *(under her breath)* Take that, Susan Mayberry.

JACK
What was that?

TINA
Oh, nothing. How was work?

JACK
The same old same old. How are your special someones doing?
(They both turn white and pause.)

BILLY & TINA
Fine.
(Carol returns)

JACK
We'll, that's just great to hear kids; hopefully someday you can have a loving someone to come home to, just like this.
(Carol bashfully smiles and gives him a kiss on the cheek. Billy and Tina then share a moment as they turn to look at one another and then quickly turn away.)

CAROL
Things just couldn't be better. Ooooh, look who's here!
(Carol points out to the audience that the camera man is standing on the ground in front of the stage.)

CAROL
Oh, hello there; it's so nice to meet you. I'll give you some time to set up, and we'll set up our pose right here at the table.

(The family gathers around the table with the girls sitting at the table and the men over their shoulders behind them. Next four lines are out to the audience while the others freeze.)

TINA
He made me bleed and it hurt so bad, but it wasn't wrong, was it?

BILLY
Don't think of Brad Summers. Don't think of Brad Summers. Don't think of Brad Summers.

JACK
The sounds.... I'll just put it to my head take a breath, pull the trigger and—

CAROL
I'm leaving him. This life is so... Things are gonna change.
(They all unfreeze and smile CLICK! The camera flashes.)

CAROL
You're ready now? Okay just give us a second. Now Tina, lower your skirt a bit, you don't want boys to think you're cheap.
(Tina's smiles fades.)

CAROL
And Billy, be a dear and take your hand off your hip; it's flamboyant.
(Billy's smile fades.)

CAROL
Jack, try and not look like you're having a root canal; it isn't that painful.
(Jack's smile fades; as it does, he turns his head toward Carol.)

JACK
Honey, you don't look so good. Why are your eyes glazed over?
(Jack turns his head back, Carol's smile fades, and everyone looks forward with blank stares and stern looks as the picture is taken, CLICK! Blackout.)



Autumn Fields

By Richard Guerra

There is no suffering, grieving, or pain
in these autumn fields; there is no pity or shame
I touch with my fingers the cold tingling strands
like the wings of a bird flowing with the land

There's no need to cry or to ache or to weep
There's life in the wind and there's plenty of sleep
With each new drawn breath the breeze seems to heal
With each new shed feather I can once again feel

Though the smell of the air brings tears to the eye
just touching the grass makes that sadness run dry
People say that for some the grass never greens
but here in the sun there's no knowing what that means

And the patterns of whistling tangles of shine
blow away all the sorrows that twirl up like twine
All the glitter in the sky can be seen in the span
All the love in one heart can be felt with one hand

And there's nothing more lovely
than the warmth from above me
and the sound of the air as it rotates the leaves
All the weight of my body's offloaded
All the fears that can fly have now floated

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

ALI ANGERMAN

Ali Angerman graduated in May 2011 with a Graphic Design degree. She works mainly in digital media and also enjoys web design.

JENN BARBO

Originally from Pennsylvania, Jenn Barbo is a Graphic Design major beginning her junior year at Curry College. She has always enjoyed the variety of possibilities that art holds and believes the best part of art is learning how to constantly alter the way she views the world around her. Barbo loves to express herself and her views through art, not only to fulfill assignments but also in response to the ins and outs of daily life.

BRITTANY CAPOZZI

Since graduating from Curry in 2010, Brittany Capozzi has been dipping her toe into: Pilates, yoga, belly dancing, and mediumship (we all need to keep our spirits high, so why not get some guidance from the real ones?), all of which have transformed into ideas for freelance pieces.

JOSH CARLSEN

From Greenville, New York, Josh Carlsen entered Curry College in the fall of 2006. His decision to study Graphic Design brought something new to the table for him.

SAMANTHA CARR

Samantha Carr is a junior who loves art and writing.

CANDACE COBUZZI

Candace Cobuzzi is a Graphic Design major from Waltham, Massachusetts. She is also double-minoring in Applied Computing and Studio Art. She wants to create art with varying degrees of style while adapting to whatever inspires her next.

BRITTANY COCCO

Originally from Northampton, Massachusetts, Brittany Cocco graduated in May 2011 with a major in Health. Though she has been an artist for many years, she had never done ceramics until her senior year. After Curry, she plans to keep art a very prominent part of her life. She finds that creating works of art helps her reflect on her spiritual journey through life.

MICHAEL COLEMAN

Michael Coleman graduated in May 2011 with a Graphic Design major and a minor in Studio Art. Born and raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he labels himself an urban artist. He has worked and experimented in various mediums. As an aspiring tattoo artist, he finds that a lot of his work revolves around tattoo-like artwork and also urban artwork. Various artists as well as personal life experiences that have accumulated over the years inspire him. Becoming more serious about his artwork has made him the person he is today.

NICHOLAS COLICCHIO

Nicholas Colicchio is a sophomore Communication major with an interest in film and television. An Honors Scholar and a Communication Scholar, he is currently serving his second term as Treasurer of the Class of 2014. He is also a member of the rock climbing club and works at WMLN, Curry's radio station.

CAITLIN COLLINS

Caitlin Collins is currently a senior majoring in Psychology at Curry College. She also minors in English, Dance, and Criminal Justice. From the small state of Rhode Island, she has big dreams to pursue a career in psychology serving young children with behavioral problems. As well, she plans to write a book some day on events and people she's met in her life so far and the struggles they have overcome to become the people they are today.

ANTHONY CORMIER

Originally from Rhode Island, Anthony Cormier graduated in May 2011 with a Graphic Design major. His artwork is inspired by nature, music, and life experiences. He likes to work with bright colors as well as photography.

MADALENE EASTERBROOK

Madalene Easterbrook is a sophomore Health major and Special Education minor from Redwood Valley, California. A member of the equestrian team at Curry College, she loves working in the arts, especially ceramics and water color painting.

MICHAEL GRADY

U.S. Army Reservist and Boston University ROTC Cadet Michael Grady is a junior year English Major at Curry College. Self-described as "a font of useless knowledge," Michael aims to serve as an active duty Intelligence Officer and pursue a Ph.D. in Medieval literature.

RICHARD GUERRA

Richard Guerra captivates his audience with such a powerful magnificence unlike anything anyone's ever seen. His work is simply put: a lustful, relentless frenzy of sheer unbreakable diction. No amount of walls, locks and chains can hold back the perpetual juggernaut of full-force gravitational centrifugality. What we are witnessing here is an electromagnetic diatomic mega field of lightning-charged dark matter molecules rippling with space-time-altering degrees of volcanic-minded supernovability. A blastacular act of tyrannosaurcary that will leave the universe in a smoldering crater of mantastrophe.

WINSTON HUGHES

Winston Hughes is a senior graphic design major. He is also this edition's production artist.

SYDNEY KASIERSKI

A *Curry Arts Journal* 2010 editor, Sydney Kasierski enjoys writing and art making and plans to pursue a career in elementary education.

ELISSA KORSAKOV

Originally from Houston, Texas, Elissa Korsakov is a May 2011 graduate who majored in Psychology, minored in English, and maintains a passion for art.

TAYLOR LARESE

From Durham, Connecticut, Taylor Larese is a senior majoring in Graphic Design.

DREW LIGAS

Drew Ligas graduated in May 2011 with a Graphic Design major and Visual Arts minor.

ALEXANDRA MCGINNIS

Alexandra McGinnis is a sophomore English major who is a founding member and President of the English Club. She works as a whitewater rafting and kayaking guide during the summer and aspires to be a novelist.

TIM McNAMARA

Tim McNamara graduated in May 2011 with a major in Criminal Justice. He is from Chelmsford, Massachusetts and made the long commute to Curry daily. He has always enjoyed drawing and decided to take a drawing course as a challenge.

ROBERT MORRISON

Robert Morrison graduated in May 2011 with a degree in Graphic Design. He is also this edition's cover artist.

TIMOTHY MURPHY

Timothy Murphy is a junior at Curry College and is majoring in English while minoring in Philosophy. His greatest influences are John Milton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Quentin Tarantino, and Stanley Kubrick.

MICHAELA POWERS

Michaela Powers is a senior double-majoring in English and Psychology and minoring in Management. She lives in Falmouth Massachusetts and plays lacrosse at Curry.

AMTUL SAEED

Raised in Ft. Myers, Florida, Amtul Saeed graduated in May 2011 with a major in Graphic Design. When she applied to Curry, she did so with the intent of becoming an elementary school teacher. However, she has always had a love for the arts and is glad that her Graphic Design degree will allow her to express her own talent and inspire others to experience the joy of art.

JUSTIN SELIG

Justin Selig graduated in May 2011 with a Communication major and a concentration in Theater. During his time at Curry, Justin was very active in Residence Life, the Student Government Association and Curry Theater; some of his major theater productions included *Once Upon a Mattress*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Peanute Galleria*, *Death of a Salesman* and *Bat Boy: the Musical*. His play in this year's arts journal was produced this past spring with great reviews. Selig is passionate when it comes to writing material that would fall under the category of dark comedy, having some humor with an edge. Originally from Hull, Massachusetts, he plans on pursuing his aspirations of being an actor and eventually an educator.

JAKE SILINS

Jake Silins graduated in May 2011 with a Graphic Design major. His art is inspired by movement and the emotions within colors. He has always been intrigued by the dimension and depth a painting can hold and tries to capture movement and space within his work. He likes creating work that looks like it can move any second.

ANDREA STENSON

Andrea Stenson graduated in May 2011 with a degree in Sociology. She enjoys photography class, and advises "feed your head."

CHRISOPHER SWAN

Originally from Springfield, Massachusetts, Christopher Swan graduated in May 2011 with a degree in Graphic Design.

COREY J. THEODORE

From Dartmouth, Massachusetts, Corey Theodore is a Psychology major and President of the class of 2014. His essay "Tripping the Nerd" was inspired by the writings of George Orwell.

AMANDA WHALEN

Originally from Millbrook, New York, Amanda Whalen graduated in May 2011 with a degree in Graphic Design. She enjoys working in mixed media and digital imaging.

CHRISTOPHER WILSON

Christopher Wilson is a junior English major at Curry College and a first-time editor for the *Curry Arts Journal*. He has Asperger's and was raised solely by his mother. He has a talent for writing, with many of his works inspired by his interest in anime.

Curry Arts Journal Submission Guidelines

All Curry students are invited to submit quality poems, short stories, essays, script excerpts, and artwork on paper for consideration by a student/faculty panel. Submission deadlines occur at mid-term and at the end of the fall and spring semesters. Up to three submissions per person per semester will be reviewed. Each submission must be accompanied by a submission form. Forms are available in the Student Center (ask at the Information Desk), Levin Library, the Academic and Performance Center, Hafer and Kennedy Academic Buildings, and the Faculty Building. Please staple a completed form to each submission and include your name on the back of the work. Do not include your name anywhere on the front of the piece (with the exception of artwork). Prose pieces must be double-spaced. We suggest that you have your literary pieces edited and proofread by a faculty member or an Academic Enrichment Center tutor before turning them in to the *Curry Arts Journal*.

Submissions can be sent or delivered to the *Curry Arts Journal* mailbox on the first floor of the Faculty Building. If your work is accepted, you will be notified ASAP and asked to send us a MS Word formatted email attachment of your entry.

For more information, please contact Karen D'Amato at kdamato@curry.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you

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